

**“THE HUMBLE, THOUGH MORE PROFITABLE ART”:  
PANORAMIC SPECTACLES IN THE AMERICAN ENTERTAINMENT  
WORLD, 1794- 1850**

by

Nalleli Guillen

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
ABSTRACT .....	xxi

### Chapter

1	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	The American Entertainment World.....	6
	Panorama Historiography .....	12
	Chapter Breakdown .....	18
2	“THE PANORAMIC OPPORTUNITY”: ARTIST ENTREPRENEURS AND THE EARLY AMERICAN ART MARKET.....	23
	Respectability in Spectacle: Early American Museums and “the Panoramic View” .....	28
	“A Taste for Spectacular Scenery”: Scene Painters Escape the Painting Room.....	49
	Young, Immigrant, and Entrepreneurial “Public Painters” .....	65
	Conclusion .....	76
3	“A RARE CHANCE TO MAKE A FORTUNE?”: THE FALSE PROMISE OF THE PANORAMA BUSINESS.....	78
	Guaranteed Success?.....	82
	Catherwood and Jackson’s Panoramic Speculation, 1838-1842 .....	89
	Stirring Interest .....	94
	The Burden of Initial Capital Investments.....	99
	Exhibition Spaces.....	99
	The Paintings .....	106
	The Evidence of Success and Public Opinion .....	114
	The Cost of Success .....	125
	Conclusion .....	139

4	REVOLUTIONARY PANORAMAS: ANTEBELLUM ENTERTAINMENT AND THE EXPLOITATION OF AMERICAN SYMPATHIES .....	142
	The <i>Panorama of Athens</i> and the Greek War of Independence.....	150
	“A Beautiful View of What was Once the City of the Muses” .....	150
	“For the Gratification & Instruction of the Students of the University”...	153
	“For want of the funds for a suitable building” .....	158
	“The people...are very zealous in the cause of the Greeks” .....	163
	“Athens, As It Is Now” .....	167
	“The Fires of Grecian Liberty Extinguished Forever”?.....	170
	The Polish Exiles in America and the Panoramas of their Late Revolution...	177
	The Baltimore Museum’s “Peristrepthic” Panorama of the Late Polish Revolution.....	183
	Conclusion .....	191
5	“MR. MAEZEL’S EXHIBITION”: ANTEBELLUM SPECTACLE, GENTILITY, AND THE <i>CONFLAGRATION OF MOSCOW</i> .....	193
	The Ingenious Mr. Maelzel and His Transatlantic Beginnings .....	196
	Maelzel’s Mysterious Automaton’s Dazzle in America .....	210
	“One of the most brilliant spectacles ever opened to the public” .....	215
	The Later Life and Career of the <i>Conflagration of Moscow</i> .....	226
	Conclusion .....	241
6	CONCLUSION.....	243
	TABLES .....	264
	FIGURES.....	269
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	339



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Expenses and Income recorded in Frederick Catherwood's Account Book from July 31, 1838 to October 30, 1841. ....	264
Table 2	Panorama profits organized by day of the week, as based on a breakdown and analysis of the Frederick Catherwood Account Book..	265
Table 3	Panorama profits organized by month, as based on a breakdown and analysis of the Frederick Catherwood Account Book .....	265
Table 4	Monthly payments to advertisers compared to monthly profits as recorded in the Frederick Catherwood Account Book. ....	266
Table 5	Newspapers and periodicals issued payments for published advertisements by Catherwood's Panorama between 1838 and 1841. Columns without data in the second column have not been verified due to vague language in the account book. ....	267
Table 6	Monthly recorded expenses from the Manhattan Gas Light Company, as recorded in the Frederick Catherwood Account Book. ....	268

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	<p>“Section of the Rotunda, Leicester Square, in which is exhibited the PANORAMA.” Aquatint, published May 15, 1801. From Robert Mitchell, <i>Plans, and views in perspective, with descriptions, of buildings erected in England and Scotland</i> (London: Printed by Wilson &amp; Co. for the author, 1801). Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection. ....</p>	269
Figure 1.2	<p>“Vue du Chateau d’Eau prise du Boulevard St. Martin.” Metz: Nicolas Gengel et Adrien Dembour, 1840. Hand colored-wood engraving. Graphic Arts Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University. ....</p>	269
Figure 1.3	<p>Ground plan and cross section view of David Wright’s Philadelphia Diorama Hall. John Neagle Commonplace Book. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. ....</p>	270
Figure 1.4	<p>Illustration of Banvard’s moving panorama mechanism from <i>Scientific American</i> 4, no. 13 (December 16, 1848): 100. ....</p>	270
Figure 2.1	<p>Thomas Sully (1783-1872), <i>The Passage of the Delaware</i>, 1819. Oil on Canvas. 146 ½ x 207 inches. <i>Museum of Fine Arts Boston</i>. ....</p>	271
Figure 2.2	<p>John Vanderlyn (1772-1852), <i>Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles</i>, 1818-1819. Oil on Canvas. 12 x 165 feet. <i>Metropolitan Museum of Art</i>. ....</p>	272
Figure 2.3	<p>Edward Savage (1761-1817), <i>The Washington Family</i>, ca. 1789-1796. Oil on Canvas, 84 1/8 x 111 7/8 inches. <i>National Gallery of Art</i>. ....</p>	273
Figure 2.4	<p>Henry Aston Barker (1774-1856) and Frederick Birnie after Robert Barker (1739-1806). <i>London from the Roof of Albion Mills</i>. 1792-1793, Hand-colored aquatint, 6 sheets, 49 x 342 cm. <i>Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection</i>. ....</p>	274
Figure 2.5	<p>“New Panorama. Belonging to G. Baker,” broadside, 1797, <i>New York Historical Society</i>. ....</p>	275

Figure 2.6	Edward Savage, “Falls on the Choudie (Chaudière) in Canada.” Late 18 <sup>th</sup> -early 19 <sup>th</sup> century. Graphite over Black Ink Applied with Pen on Cream laid Paper. <i>Worcester Art Museum</i> .....276
Figure 2.7	“Explanation of the Cosmorama.” From <i>La Belle Assemblée</i> (London), December 1, 1821. <i>New York Public Library</i> .....276
Figure 2.8	John Lee (engraver) after Sir Robert Ker Porter (artist), Key to the “Great Historical Picture of the Storming of Seringapatam.” Ca. 1800. <i>Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design and Department of Paintings, Victoria and Albert Museum</i> .....277
Figure 2.9	Giovanni Vendramini (engraver) after Robert Ker Porter (artist), <i>The Last Effort of Tippoo Sultan, in defence [sic] of the fortress of Seringapatam</i> . 1 <sup>st</sup> in suite of 3 hand-colored engravings, ca. 1802. 102.9 x 77.6 cm. <i>Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library</i> .....277
Figure 2.10	Giovanni Vendramini (engraver) after Robert Ker Porter (artist), <i>The storming of Seringapatam</i> . 2 <sup>nd</sup> in suite of 3 hand-colored engravings, ca. 1802. 96.1 x 68.3 cm. <i>Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library</i> .....278
Figure 2.11	Giovanni Vendramini (engraver) after Robert Ker Porter (artist), <i>The glorious conquest of Seringapatam</i> . 3 <sup>rd</sup> in suite of 3 hand-colored engravings, ca. 1802. 98.6 x 73 cm. <i>Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library</i> .....278
Figure 2.12	“The Columbian Museum,” broadside, ca. 1811. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> .....279
Figure 2.13	James Kidder (1776-1852), <i>A Representation of the Great Storm at Providence, Sept. 23, 1815</i> . Oil on Canvas, after 1815. 38 ½ x 48 ¾ inches. <i>Historical New England Collection</i> .....280
Figure 2.14	Unattributed (potentially James Kidder), <i>A Natural Representation of Market-Street in Philadelphia</i> . After 1815. <i>Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, PA</i> .....281

Figure 2.15	Detail, <i>A Natural Representation of Market-Street, in Philadelphia</i> . Potentially painted by James Kidder, after 1815. <i>Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, PA</i> . . . . .	281
Figure 2.16	Cigar Case representing the battle between the <i>Constitution and Guerriere</i> . Ca. 1815-1825. <i>Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont, Winterthur Museum 1964.791</i> . . . . .	282
Figure 2.17	Michele Felice Cornè (1752-1845), <i>Attack on Tripoli</i> . After 1806. Pen and ink sketch. <i>United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland</i> . . . . .	283
Figure 2.18	Michele Felice Cornè, <i>Attack on Tripoli</i> , 1805. Oil on Canvas. <i>United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland</i> . . . . .	284
Figure 2.19	Michele Felice Cornè, <i>Attack on Tripoli</i> , 1805-1810. Oil on Canvas. <i>Rhode Island Historical Society</i> . . . . .	284
Figure 2.20	William Hoogland (engraver) after Michele Felice Cornè (artist), <i>Constitution's Escape from the British Squadron after a chase of sixty hours</i> . From <i>The Naval Monument</i> (Boston: A Bowen, and sold by Cummings and Hilliard, 1816). <i>Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection</i> . . . . .	285
Figure 2.21	Abel Bowen (engraver) after Michele Felice Cornè, <i>The Constitution Bearing Down for the Guerriere</i> . From <i>The Naval Monument</i> (Boston: A Bowen, and sold by Cummings and Hilliard, 1816). <i>Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection</i> . . . . .	285
Figure 2.22	Abel Bowen (engraver) after Michele Felice Cornè, <i>The Constitution in Close Action with the Guerriere</i> . From <i>The Naval Monument</i> (Boston: A Bowen, and sold by Cummings and Hilliard, 1816). <i>Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection</i> . . . . .	286
Figure 2.23	"The Monster Panorama of the Crystal Palace," broadside. P.T. Barnum proprietor, ca. 1852. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> . . . . .	287
Figure 2.24	"Mr. Holland's Benefit," <i>New-York Public Advertiser</i> , January 4, 1809. <i>America's Historical Newspapers</i> . . . . .	288
Figure 2.25	Advertisement for John Joseph Holland's "New-York Panorama," <i>New York Columbian</i> , November 6, 1810. <i>America's Historical Newspapers</i> . . . . .	288

Figure 2.26	<i>A Description of the Panorama Representing the City and Environs of New York. Painted by John J. Holland</i> (New York: Printed by David Longworth, 1809). <i>Houghton Library at Harvard University</i> .....	289
Figure 2.27	Samuel Davenport (engraver), <i>New York</i> , ca. 1835. <i>The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library</i> .....	290
Figure 2.28	<i>City Hall</i> , 19 <sup>th</sup> -century engraving. <i>The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, New York Public Library</i> .....	290
Figure 2.29	Holland and Reinagle's <i>Boston Panorama</i> , broadside. New York, 1811-1812. <i>New York Historical Society</i> .....	291
Figure 2.30	Worrall and Smith's <i>Panorama of Boston</i> , broadside. Boston, 1810. <i>Massachusetts Historical Society</i> . ....	291
Figure 2.31	John Worrall, <i>The Old Drop Scene</i> . Providence, RI, ca. 1812. Oil on Canvas, 135 x 288 inches. <i>Rhode Island Historical Society</i> .....	292
Figure 2.32	<i>First Baptist Meeting House, Providence, R.I., erected A.D. 1775. Rider Broadside Collection. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library</i> .....	292
Figure 2.33	Benjamin West (1738-1820), <i>The Death of General Wolfe</i> , ca. 1770. Oil on Canvas, 152.5 x 214 cm. <i>National Gallery of Canada</i> .....	293
Figure 2.34	John Trumbull (1756-1843), <i>The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec, December 31, 1775</i> , ca. 1786. Oil on Canvas, 24 5/8 x 37 inches. <i>Yale University Art Gallery</i> . ....	293
Figure 2.35	<i>Rhode-Island American</i> , January 6, 1824. <i>America's Historical Newspapers</i> .....	294
Figure 2.36	<i>Map of the town of Providence: from actual survey</i> . Providence, R.I.: Daniel Anthony, [1823]. <i>Library of Congress</i> .....	294
Figure 2.37	<i>Magnificent and Highly-finished Panorama, a Walk in the Garden of Eden</i> , broadside. Boston, 1849. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> . ....	295
Figure 2.38	Robert Salmon (1775-c.1845), <i>View of Algiers</i> , ca. 1829. <i>New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, Connecticut</i> . ....	296

Figure 2.39	Robert Salmon (1775-c. 1845), <i>The British Fleet Forming a Line off Algiers</i> , ca. 1829. Distemper on canvas, 99 x 190 ¼ inches. <i>Museum of Fine Arts Boston</i> . ....	296
Figure 2.40	Robert Salmon (1775-c.1845), <i>Boston from Pemberton Hill</i> , ca. 1829. Tempera on Canvas, 100 x 183 inches. <i>Historic New England</i> .....	297
Figure 3.1	Diagram and key for Frederick Catherwood’s <i>Panorama of Jerusalem</i> , from <i>A Description of a View of Jerusalem, now exhibiting at the Panorama, Broadway, corner of Mercer and Prince Streets</i> (New York: William Osborne, 1838). <i>Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection</i> .....	297
Figure 3.2	Frederick Catherwood Account Book [November 1838 to October 1841], 6 and 7 May, 1839. This single entry day book records daily gross receipts and expenses relating to the Catherwood’s Panorama in New York. <i>New York Historical Society</i> . ....	298
Figure 3.3	Exterior of John Vanderlyn’s New York Rotunda building, on the corner of Chambers and Cross Streets. Lithographic Frontispiece of A.J. Davis, <i>Views of the Public Buildings in the City of New York</i> (New York: Printed & Published by A. Imbert, 1827). <i>The Edward W.C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps and Pictures, Metropolitan Museum of Art</i> .....	299
Figure 3.4	“The Splendid Panorama of Jerusalem,” broadside. New York, 1838. <i>New York Historical Society</i> . ....	300
Figure 3.5	Catherwood and Jackson’s New York Rotunda was on the corner of Mercer and Prince Streets. <i>Stranger’s Guide Through the City of New York</i> ([New York]: Published by H. Phelps, 1841). <i>Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, New York Public Library</i> .....	301
Figure 3.6	<i>Jerusalem – The Mosque of Omar</i> . Drawn by D. Roberts from a sketch by Frederick Catherwood, engraved by William Finden. From <i>Landscape Illustrations of the Bible</i> (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1836). <i>New York Public Library</i> .....	301
Figure 3.7	Frederick Catherwood’s business card for his architectural business. <i>New York Historical Society</i> . ....	302

Figure 3.8	“View of the Holy City of Jerusalem!! Now Exhibiting at the Panorama, Charles Street,” broadside. Boston, 1837. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> .....	302
Figure 3.9	Frontispiece for Dr. L.E. Emerson’s <i>Grand Moving Mirror of California, or California as it was &amp; as it is</i> , script and diary. Ca. 1855. <i>Maine History Society</i> .....	303
Figure 3.10	John Lewis Krimmel (1787-1821), “Independence Day Celebration in Centre Square,” 1819. Watercolor and ink on paper. <i>The Historical Society of Pennsylvania</i> . ....	303
Figure 3.11	Advertisement for Catherwood’s “Panoramas of Jerusalem and Niagara Falls,” <i>Boston Post</i> , 4 July 1837. <i>Newspapers.com</i> .....	304
Figure 3.12	Detail, lower right quadrant of the engraving plate for the guide to the <i>Panorama of Athens</i> . ca. 1820-1837. <i>HUC 8842.168.2. Harvard University Archives</i> .....	304
Figure 3.13	Fold out engraving of the <i>Panorama of Athens</i> from <i>Description of the View of Athens and Surrounding Country</i> ([Boston]: s.n., 1820-1821). <i>MS Thr941, Houghton Library, Harvard University</i> .....	305
Figure 3.14	<i>Explanation of a View of the Bay of Islands, New Zealand</i> (New York: Printed by William Osborn, 1840). Notice the breaks in the engraving field in the second and fourth quadrants. <i>The Historical Society of Pennsylvania</i> . ....	305
Figure 3.15	“A Card. The Panoramas,” <i>The Long-Island Star</i> (Brooklyn, NY), August 1, 1839. <i>Newspapers.com</i> .....	306
Figure 3.16	This watercolor depicts the interior of the Park Theater five years before gas was installed. John Searle, <i>Interior of the Park Theater, New York City</i> , ca. 1822. Watercolor, black ink, and graphite on paper. <i>Gift of the Heirs of Mrs. Harriet Elizabeth Bayard Van Rensselaer, New-York Historical Society</i> . ....	306
Figure 3.17	Between 1840 and 1842, this building was Catherwood’s Philadelphia Panorama. W.H. Rease (lithographer), Frederick Kuhl (printer), “Philadelphia horse & carriage bazaar, Southeast corner of Ninth and George Streets.” April 1848. <i>Wainwright Lithograph Collection, Library Company of Philadelphia</i> . ....	307

Figure 3.18	“Will soon close. The Exhibition of Banvard’s Mammoth Panorama of the Mississippi River at Amory Hall,” broadside. Boston, 1847. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> . . . . .	308
Figure 4.1	“Champney’s Celebrated Picture of the River Rhine!,” broadside. Boston, ca. 1849. <i>Boston Athenaeum</i> . . . . .	309
Figure 4.2	“Moving Diorama of the R. Island Revolution,” broadside. Providence, R.I., 1845. <i>Sidney S. Rider Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University</i> . . . . .	310
Figure 4.3	Schematic engraving of the <i>Panorama of Athens</i> , from the 1842 descriptive pamphlet published by Metcalf, Keith, and Nichols (Boston: Printers to the University). <i>Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection</i> . . . . .	311
Figure 4.4	“View of the Parthenon from the Propylea,” from <i>Views in Greece from Drawings by Edward Dodwell</i> (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1819). <i>Houghton Library, Harvard University</i> . . . . .	312
Figure 4.5	“Pass of Thermopylae,” from <i>Views in Greece from Drawings by Edward Dodwell</i> (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1819). <i>Houghton Library, Harvard University</i> . . . . .	312
Figure 4.6	Detail featuring the modern city of Athens, from Selina Bracebridge, <i>Notes Descriptive of a Panoramic Sketch of Athens, taken May, 1839</i> (London, W.H. Dalton, 1839). <i>Houghton Library, Harvard University</i> . . . . .	313
Figure 4.7	The modern city of Athens is featured prominently in Plate 10 of Ferdinand Stademann’s <i>Panorama von Athen</i> (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1977 [Munich, 1841]). . . . .	313
Figure 4.8	Bill of Lading [for Shipping the Panorama of Athens], 4 June, 1825. <i>Harvard University. Corporation. Harvard College Papers, 1<sup>st</sup> series. UAI 5.100 (Volume 11, Item 169). Harvard University Archives</i> . . . . .	314
Figure 4.9	Advertisement for the panorama of the <i>City of Paris</i> , exhibited at John Vanderlyn’s New York Panoramic Rotunda. <i>Mercantile Advertiser</i> (NY), October 1, 1818. <i>America’s Historical Newspapers</i> . . . . .	314
Figure 4.10	Advertisement for the <i>Panorama Picture of Athens</i> at John Vanderlyn’s Rotunda in New York. “Greece,” <i>New-York National Advocate</i> , August 21, 1826. <i>America’s Historical Newspapers</i> . . . . .	315



Figure 4.11	Printed handkerchief, “The Dismemberment of Poland,” <i>Winterthur Museum 1959.973</i> .....	315
Figure 4.12	“Europe” and “Poland as Divided” from <i>A New General Atlas, Chiefly Intended for the Use of Schools and Private Libraries</i> (New-York: Published by James V. Seaman, 1820). <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> ..	316
Figure 4.13	Hippolyte Bellangé (artist), “Le Refugié Polonaise,” ca. 1831. French lithograph. <i>Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection. John Hay Library, Brown University Library</i> .....	317
Figure 4.14	Edward Henry Courbould (artist), John Neagle (engraver), “The Polish Exiles,” ca. 1837-1850. Published in <i>The Christian Keepsake</i> (Philadelphia, 1837). <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> .....	318
Figure 4.15	“Hymn for Poland,” broadside. [United States]: Printed by a Greek, (Sciote Boy), in gratitude to Poland, 1834. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> .....	319
Figure 4.16	Alfred S. Waugh (1810-1856), <i>Portrait of Chief Justice John Marshall</i> , ca. 1833. White wax on pale blue wax ground. <i>Gift of Mrs. Edgar Munson, 1943, Philadelphia Museum of Art</i> .....	320
Figure 4.17	Advertisement for <i>Sinclair’s Grand Peristrepthic or Moving Panorama. Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser</i> , May 14, 1833. <i>America’s Historical Newspapers</i> .....	320
Figure 4.18	Advertisement for the <i>Grand Peristrepthic Panorama of the Late Polish Revolution. American and Commercial Daily Advertiser</i> (Baltimore, MD), July 12, 1834. <i>America’s Historical Newspapers</i> .....	321
Figure 4.19	George Benedikt Wunder (engraver), “Patriotische Opfer der Polen zur Rettung des Vaterlandes,” [Patriotic victims of the Poles to save Fatherland], after 1831. German hand-colored engraving on paper. <i>Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection. John Hay Library, Brown University Library</i> .....	322
Figure 4.20	Karl Laeillot-Hartwig (artist), “L’armée polonaise a la bataille de Grochow,” after 1831. French hand-colored lithograph. <i>Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection. John Hay Library, Brown University Library</i> .....	322

Figure 4.21	Advertisement for the <i>Grand Moving Panorama of the Wars for Liberty in Hungary, Upper Italy, and the City of Rome</i> . <i>Newark Daily Advertiser</i> (NJ), November 11, 1851. <i>America's Historical Newspapers</i> .....	323
Figure 5.1	P.G. Pintz (engraver), "The Great Automaton Chess Player." From Karl Gottlieb von Windisch's pamphlet, "Briefe Ueber den Schachspieler des Herrn von Kempelen" (Basel: s.n., 1783). <i>The Library Company of Philadelphia</i> .....	323
Figure 5.2	Johann Nepomuk Maelzel (inventor), Metronome, ca. 1821. Produced in Paris, France. <i>Purchase, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, by exchange, 1979. Metropolitan Museum of Art</i> .....	324
Figure 5.3	"Conflagration of Moscow – An Ocean of Flame." From Frederick Butler, <i>Sketches of Universal History, Sacred, and Profane</i> (Hartford: Published by Cooke & Hale, 1818), 381. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> .....	325
Figure 5.4	"Stollenwerck's Mechanical Panorama," broadside. [New York: 1812]. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> .....	326
Figure 5.5	"Maelzel's Exhibition," broadside. Boston, 1828. <i>American Antiquarian Society</i> .....	327
Figure 5.6	"Vue de la Ville de Moscou prise de la gauche du Balcon du Palais Imperial." Mathias Gottfried Eichler (printer) after Gerard de La Barthe, ca. 1799. <i>Courtesy The Trustees of the British Museum</i> .....	328
Figure 5.7	"Lowering a Scene" and "Scenes Ready for Lowering," from Albert A. Hopkins, <i>Magic: Stage Illustrations and Scientific Diversions</i> (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1897), 362, 364. ....	329
Figure 5.8	"The Chess Player," from Gamaliel Bradford, <i>The History and Analysis of the Supposed Automaton Chess Player, of M. De Kempelen</i> (Boston: Published by Hilliard, Gray and Co., 1826). <i>The Library Company of Philadelphia</i> .....	330
Figure 5.9	Woodcut engraving of "Maelzel's Original Splendid Mechanical Panorama of the Conflagration of Moscow!" <i>Daily Picayune</i> (New Orleans, LA), April 13, 1838. <i>America's Historical Newspapers</i> .....	330

Figure 5.10	“The Burning of Moscow,” from Albert A. Hopkins, <i>Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions</i> (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1897), 363.....	331
Figure 5.11	“The Conflagration of the Masonic Hall, Chesnut Street Philadelphia.” Samuel Jones and John Lewis Krimmel (painters), John Hill (engraver). Reissued 1876 (published June 1819). <i>The Library Company of Philadelphia</i> . ....	332
Figure 5.12	“Maelzel’s Exhibition, at the Julien Hall,” broadside. Boston, 1826. <i>Library of Congress</i> . ....	333
Figure 5.13	“Panorama of Philadelphia from the State House Steeple, North,” in J.C. Wild’s <i>Panorama and Views of Philadelphia and its Vicinity</i> (Philadelphia: J.B. Chevalier, 1838). <i>Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection</i> . ....	334
Figure 5.14	Trade card for “Frederick Dreer’s Cabinet Ware Room, 152 South Fourth Street, Philadelphia.” ca. 1825. <i>Print Department, The Library Company of Philadelphia</i> . ....	334
Figure 5.15	Ticket to the presentation of the “Burning of Moscow and Dioptric Views.” Philadelphia, 1866. <i>The Library Company of Philadelphia</i> . ....	335
Figure 6.1	“The First Throb of the London Season,” <i>Illustrated London News</i> , March 31, 1849. ....	335
Figure 6.2	Samuel Bell Waugh (1814-1885), <i>The Bay and Harbor of New York</i> , ca. 1855. Oil on Canvas, 99 x 198 in. <i>Museum of the City of New York</i> . ....	336
Figure 6.3	One of three preparatory sketches by Osbert Burr Loomis likely relating to his <i>Panorama of Cuba</i> . Photograph from the collection of the Loomis Chaffee School Archives, <i>Loomis Chaffee School, Windsor, Connecticut, USA</i> . ....	336
Figure 6.4	Benjamin Champney (1817-1907), “Marksburg & Braubach,” ca. 1840s. Graphite on paper. <i>Fine Art Collection, Longfellow House Washington’s Headquarters’, Boston, Massachusetts</i> . ....	337
Figure 6.5	“The Historiscope: A Panorama & History of America” came enclosed in its own decorative box, and with tickets, a lecture, and advertisement	

	broadside. <i>Col. 121, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera</i> .....	337
Figure 6.6	“The Historiscope: A Complete Panorama of America!” broadside. [Springfield: Mass.]: Published by Milton Bradley & Co., [1868]. <i>The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera</i> .....	338

## ABSTRACT

In the first half of the nineteenth century, panorama exhibitions were a hybrid amusement, an “art entertainment” that straddled the line between “fine art” and “entertainment” when both fields were hotly contested battle grounds. As their proprietors began infiltrating the business of American entertainment, panoramas were either second-market imports—European productions searching for new audiences—or domestic experiments. In either case, they were entrepreneurial efforts that depended entirely on the approval of the public to achieve financial success. That simple fact forced panorama exhibitors to produce attractions that they believed were most likely to please a wide popular audience, a difficult task because that public itself was in flux as the United States experienced rapid social, economic, political, and cultural changes. By focusing on the American panoramic experience through the first half of the nineteenth century, this project argues that this entertainment form was an oddity even in its prime and, as a result, was more prone to financial failure than success. However, close examination of the circular panorama and its related forms also offers important insights into the early American art economy, the business of popular entertainment, and the transatlantic interests of antebellum Americans.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, panorama exhibitions were a hybrid amusement, an “art entertainment” that straddled the line between “fine art” and “entertainment” when both fields were hotly contested battle grounds. As their proprietors began infiltrating the business of American entertainment, panoramas were either second-market imports—European productions searching for new audiences—or domestic experiments. In either case, they were entrepreneurial efforts that depended entirely on the approval of the public to achieve financial success. That simple fact forced panorama exhibitors to produce attractions that they believed were most likely to please a wide popular audience, a difficult task because that public itself was in flux as the United States experienced rapid social, economic, political, and cultural changes. By focusing on the American panoramic experience through the first half of the nineteenth century, this project argues that this entertainment form was an oddity even in its prime and, as a result, was more prone to financial failure than success. However, close examination of the circular panorama and its related forms also offers important insights into the early American art economy, the business of popular entertainment, and the transatlantic interests of antebellum Americans.

Unlike other commercial amusements, panoramas have not received proper consideration as part of the world of domestic entertainment in early America. These spectacular painted attractions, exhibited as both permanent illusionistic installations and itinerant exhibitions, existed alongside, and competed with, amusements such as

the theater, museums, concert halls, and pleasure gardens. Through a series of case studies, this dissertation will address that neglect, reconstituting the business of panoramas and interpreting the social, economic, and cultural work done by these commercial attractions as they were adapted to suit American audiences.

Panoramas were a transatlantic phenomenon of the late eighteenth century, an invention and exhibition technique tested in Europe before being imported into the young United States. Although today the word panorama is liberally used to describe any expansive vista, it was coined in reference to a specific invention. Derived from the Greek roots “pan” (all) and “horama” (view), the original “all-embracing view” was a 360-degree, cylindrical landscape painting patented in 1787 by Irish-painter Robert Barker. He described his invention as “La Nature à Coup d’Oeil,” a specially-designed exhibition hall “for the purposes of displaying views of Nature at Large.”<sup>1</sup> After years of experimenting with preparatory drawings and the best method for transferring those designs onto a larger than life surface without visual distortions, Barker’s dream was realized in 1794 when his Rotunda, a circular building ninety feet in diameter, opened in London’s Leicester Square. (figure 1.1) From its central platforms, spectators were meant to imagine not that they were gazing at an immense painting, but actually the environs of urban London, or Constantinople, or Paris.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Barker, “Specification of the Patent Granted to Mr. Robert Baker...Called by Him ‘La Nature à Coup d’Oeil,” in *Repertory of Arts and Manufactures: Consisting of Original Communications, Specifications of Patent Inventions, and Selections of Useful Practical Papers from the Transactions of the Philosophical Societies of All Nations, &c. &c.* (London, s.n., 1796), 165-167.

Following its opening, the panorama concept spread quickly throughout the world, arriving in the U.S. in 1794, the same year Barker's Rotunda premiered in London.<sup>2</sup>

The original panorama inspired subsequent painting exhibition adaptations that were also imported into the United States. In 1822, inventor Louis-Jacques Mandé Daguerre, remembered for his groundbreaking photographic experiments and invention of the Daguerreotype, developed the "Diorama."<sup>3</sup> Rather than being an entirely circular painted canvases, Daguerre's attractions were large, traditionally rectangular paintings that allowed for the creation of illusionistic lighting effects. A thin material like cotton or muslin was painted on both sides with opaque and transparent colors. When a light source was shifted from facing the front to the back of the painting, it created the appearance that the scene had changed instantaneously. The Diorama's paintings could transform from day to night, or create the drama of a violent storm or expanding fire. Like Barker's Panorama, Daguerre's original exhibition in Paris necessitated a customized building, but his invention also gave rise to traveling attractions painted in "the dioramic style." (figure 1.2) They arrived in the United States likely beginning in the 1830s, when showmen like David Wright began touring with their popular paintings, including dioramic pictures like the "Departure of the Israelites out of Egypt" by French painter Hippolyte Sébron.<sup>4</sup> Although an itinerant

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 128-140; Stephen Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 99-142.

<sup>3</sup> Louis-Jacques Mandé Daguerre, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Various Processes of the Daguerreotype and the Diorama* (London: McLean, 1839).

<sup>4</sup> Altick, 163-172; Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 139-159.



showman, Wright adapted exhibition spaces for his pictures in Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia. In the latter city, artist John Neagle purchased the painting from Wright and recorded his exhibition hall's ground plan from above and in cross section, preparing to improve the space for his own performances.<sup>5</sup> (figure 1.3)

The most significant adaptation made to panorama exhibitions was divorcing them permanently from the cumbersome specialized exhibition spaces required for stationary Panoramas and Dioramas. While those buildings were crucial for creating the illusion of the painted scenes, they were costly undertakings. In England in the mid-1810s, a father-son partnership first found one solution to these problems. The "Messrs. Marshall," Peter Marshall and his son William, pioneered what they called "the peristrepthic panorama." Their attraction placed long stretches of canvas, potentially hundreds of feet long, between two rollers and by the turning of a crank, moved the painting horizontally before a seated audience. As a result of these adaptations, a panoramic attraction could be set up on an exhibition hall or theater stage before a seated audience and accompanied by a narrator and music.<sup>6</sup> It took a

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<sup>5</sup> *Diorama: Mr. Wright, proprietor of the Diorama at Boston, respectfully announces to the inhabitants of Salem, that his exhibition of the follow views, painted on a large scale, is now open for a short time only* (Salem, MA[?]: s.n., ca. 1843), American Antiquarian Society; John Neagle Commonplace Book, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Extensive correspondence between Harvard College president Josiah Quincy and David Wright is preserved in Harvard College Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 1826-1863. Harvard University Archives. Robert W. Torchia, *John Neagle: Philadelphia Portrait Painter* (Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, 65-81.

generation for the peristrepthic panorama to arrive in the United States, likely crossing the Atlantic with showman William Sinclair, in 1830.<sup>7</sup>

This dissertation focuses on this formative period when the circular panorama, dioramas, peristrepthic panoramas and numerous painted popular “spectacles” were exhibited in the United States. They all circulated simultaneously, and the distinctions between the formats were not always clear, or even significant, to the amusement going public. This is evident in complaints made by author Eliza Leslie in her *Behavior Book: A Manual for Ladies* (1839) about the “very common error, that of calling a diorama a panorama...which it is not...the error has grown so common that persons fall habitually into it, though knowing all the time that it is an error.”<sup>8</sup> When considering these painted spectacles as part of the American entertainment market, it is perhaps more useful then to think of them communally, as “art entertainments.”

One related panorama exhibition form largely falls outside the purview of this project but necessitates mention here. Although they were largely identical in form, the peristrepthic panorama was rebranded in 1846 in the United States as the “moving panorama.” In December 1846, self-taught theatrical painter John Banvard premiered his *Panorama of the Mississippi River* at Boston’s Amory Hall. Like the earlier peristrepthic panoramas, this moving panorama was horizontally suspended upon rollers. (figure 1.4) Referred to as the “three-mile painting,” Banvard’s panorama represented a water passage down the Mississippi River, “1200 miles in length” and

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<sup>7</sup> Erkki Huhtamo, “Penetrating the peristrepthic: An unwritten chapter in the history of the panorama,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 6, no. 3 (2008): 219-238.

<sup>8</sup> Eliza Leslie, *Miss Leslie’s Behavior Book: A Guide and Manual for Ladies* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, 1839), 240-242.

crossing through seven states.<sup>9</sup> Reportedly, over 200,000 people visited the panorama in the year it was exhibited in Boston and earned the artist over \$50,000 in that city alone.<sup>10</sup> The moving panorama was the culmination of the fifty years of American panorama exhibitions that preceded it, and yet has overshadowed the earlier period. While the moving panorama is mentioned throughout this project, the period between 1794 and 1846 is its primary focus.<sup>11</sup>

### **The American Entertainment World**

Despite their sizable presence, commercial nature and direct appeals to cultivate American audiences, panorama exhibitions rarely feature in historical examinations of nineteenth-century urban amusements. Nevertheless, they navigated the same social environment as theaters, museums, concert halls, and itinerant

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<sup>9</sup> Broadside for the “Exhibition of Banvard’s Mammoth Panorama of the Mississippi River at Amory Hall,” Boston, 1847. American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Banvard’s career, see: John Francis McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 18-46; John Hanners, “‘The Great Three-Mile Painting’: John Banvard’s Mississippi Panorama,” *Journal of American Culture* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 28-42; Martha Sandweiss, “‘Of Instruction for Their Faithfulness:’ Panoramas, Indian Galleries, and Western Daguerreotypes,” in *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 48-86; David Robinson, “The American Invasion: Impact and Influence of the Mississippi Panoramas,” in *The Panorama in the Old World and the New* (Amberg, Germany: International Panorama Council, 2010), 20-27.

<sup>11</sup> Beginning in the early 1880s, there was also a brief revival of the static circular panorama in America, referred to as “cycloramas.” Cycloramas fall outside this dissertation’s chronological focus. For more information on cycloramas, see: Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, 342-344; Dean S. Thomas, *The Gettysburg Cyclorama: A Portray of the High Tide of the Confederacy* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1989).

attractions, and the literature focusing on American entertainment identifies the cultural trends that also impacted panorama exhibitions in the first half of the nineteenth century. Based on this scholarship, several major assertions about the culture of American amusements merit consideration.

The influence of European cultural traditions upon the development of American amusements continued long after the country achieved political independence from Great Britain. Local cultural institutions were modelled after European examples and imported content from abroad. American theaters relied on the expertise of European architects, scene painters, and theater owners, who promoted European plays and the talents of foreign performers.<sup>12</sup> Establishments like New York City's "Shakespeare Gallery," which exhibited paintings featuring scenes from the Bard's dramatic works, and the New York Vauxhall Gardens directly referenced English establishments.<sup>13</sup> Even the majority of the itinerant performers and professional entertainers plying their attractions in America were from abroad.<sup>14</sup> By the 1820s, domestic productions and performers did begin to carve a place among commercial amusements in America, but the process was gradual and the continued strong influence from Europe should not be minimized.

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<sup>12</sup> Heather S. Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003); Susan Porter, *With an Air Debonair: Musical Theatre in America, 1785-1815* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Naomi J. Stubbs, *Cultivating National Identity Through Performance: American Pleasure Gardens and Entertainment* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013)

<sup>13</sup> Stubbs, *Cultivating National Identity*, 2013; Richard W. Hutton and Laura Nelke, *Alderman Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (Chicago: The Gallery, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Benes, *For a Short Time Only: Itinerants and the Resurgence of Popular Culture in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 51-52.

Urban commercial amusements also evolved within a society that was at times hostile to their existence. Some religious leaders objected strongly to the idleness of popular entertainment. Prior to the Revolutionary War, several state legislatures banned professional theaters on the grounds that they were amoral and frivolous pursuits that might lead to the corruption of their publics.<sup>15</sup> Although anti-theater laws were lifted by the turn of the nineteenth century, the moral anxiety that had originally inspired them remained prevalent into midcentury.<sup>16</sup> As a result, most entertainment proprietors were obliged to promote their attractions as “rational amusements.” The caveat that an entertainment educate while it amused its audiences became a redeeming quality that promoters and owners of commercial amusements embraced, at least in their rhetoric.<sup>17</sup>

While debates over the morality of entertainment continued, early nineteenth-century amusements nevertheless catered to a vibrant public culture that was shared across class lines. Leisurely pastimes that today are associated with elite audiences, such as attending Shakespearean plays and Italian operas or visiting museums, were not then regarded as “high culture.” They catered to diverse audiences and only became “high” in the second half of the nineteenth century when members of the upper class began actively enforcing social hierarchies that sacralized those formerly

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<sup>15</sup> David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale’s Museum and its Audience* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 13-34.

<sup>16</sup> David Monod, *The Soul of Pleasure: Sentiment and Sensation in Nineteenth-Century American Mass Entertainment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird & Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 1-7.

shared popular attractions.<sup>18</sup> Economic barriers did enforce a certain amount of social stratification at entertainment venues. High or varied ticket pricing at theaters sometimes excluded working-class patrons, but commercial amusements were available to anyone with the price of a ticket in hand and flourished best with heterogeneous patronage.

That said, commercial entertainment in the first half of the nineteenth century was also transformed by the demands of a powerful consumer group rising to prominence throughout this period: the middle class. Their influence can be seen in the divergent career trajectories of two key entertainment figures who bookend this period: Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827) and P.T. Barnum (1810-1891). Peale was the patriarch of an artistic and entrepreneurial family whose museum empire originated with the opening of “Peale’s Museum” in Philadelphia in 1786. An intellectual and member of Philadelphia’s respectable elite, the elder Peale was one of the first American museum proprietors to open a public institution based upon Enlightenment principles. Building upon the centuries-old European tradition of the “cabinet of curiosities,” Peale imagined his museum and its collections as presenting the rational order of the universe in tangible form, and thus providing this information for the consumption and edification of his museum patrons. However, Peale’s plan for establishing a temple for popular education was more an ideological dream than a practical understanding of American pleasure seekers or their desires, a flaw that

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<sup>18</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 13-33; Naomi J. Stubbs, “Performing Class: The Challenge to and Reaffirmation of Class Divisions and Hierarchies,” in *Cultivating National Identity through Performance*, 65-85.

would plague Peale's business efforts and those of his sons into the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

Beginning in the 1810s, Peale's sons opened their own museums in Baltimore, Maryland, New York City, and Utica, New York. Originally intending to follow in their father's example, Peale's sons Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian, Franklin, and Linnaeus quickly found that "respectable" educational and scientific attractions did not attract broad audiences or raise the necessary revenue to keep their businesses afloat. As a result, they broke with their father's ideological model and instead endeavored to provide their potential audiences with the light "rational amusements" they desired. Rubens, in a letter to his brother Franklin, stated this outright, writing that "everything depends on pleasing the visitors, if they are gratified, they gratify us with their money."<sup>20</sup> Into the early 1840s, the Peale museums presented attractions like the "Grecian Dog Apollo," automatons, giants, and theatrical performances. While some scholars have interpreted this change as the younger Peale's "pandering" to the "lower levels of popular tastes," it also exemplifies the consumer power of middle class audiences rising to prominence by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990), 44-57; 80-87; 112-119; David Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 1995; Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1980).

<sup>20</sup> Rubens Peale to Franklin Peale, April 25 and 28, 1826, in Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Collected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family on Microfiche* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Microforms, 1981), Series VII-A, Card 5, as cited in Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 116.

This transition was fully realized in P.T. Barnum, a “common man” of Jacksonian America whose endeavors as a showman were unapologetically centered upon engaging middle class audiences and their desire for entertainment. Barnum’s American Museum in New York, built in part with Peale Museum collections he acquired as the latter institutions closed, offered his audiences traditional curios and natural history specimens but also featured rotating exhibitions of “humbugs,” like the Feejee Mermaid, which intrigued as much as infuriated paying spectators. Barnum’s showmanship can (and has) been interpreted as a decline in “respectability” within American amusement culture.<sup>22</sup> However, he also brought an understanding and respect for his audiences that heralds a rise in egalitarianism in mid-nineteenth century American entertainment.<sup>23</sup> For all entertainers active between the “age of Peale” and the “age of Barnum,” including panoramacists, finding a balance between respectability, amusement, and spectacle was a constant negotiation.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example: Sellers, *Mr. Peale’s Museum*, 1980 or Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973); Andrea Stulman Dennett, “Barnum and the Museum Revolution, 1841-1870,” in *Weird & Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press 1997), 23-40. Barnum’s legacy and that of his exhibitions, particularly those which exploited human performers, is of course a complex subject. For more on Barnum, see: Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Linda Frost, *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850-1877* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).



## Panorama Historiography

The historiography of panorama spectacles is eclectic and not necessarily cohesive or in conversation with one another. It is made up of an assemblage of scholarship across several disciplines, whose contributors have brought their distinct interests and methodologies into their examinations of the subject. These hybrid creations, painted popular culture exhibitions, are attractive to scholars of media, film, and theater, art historians and visual culture scholars, and increasingly, to American social and cultural historians.

Rigorous academic study of panoramas began in Europe over forty years ago, and several of the most important references on the subject were published originally in German and French. Richard D. Altick's *The Shows of London* (1978) includes the circular panorama and its related forms within its sweeping study of London's public nontheatrical entertainments and exhibitions.<sup>24</sup> Stephen Oettermann's *The Panorama: A History of a Mass Medium* (1980) and Bernard Comment's *The Painted Panorama* (1999) are key references that take an ostensibly global perspective on the phenomenon.<sup>25</sup> Each work introduces the media precursors that paved the road for the emergence of the panorama in the late eighteenth century, discuss the role panoramas played in shaping the perceptions of their viewing public, and outline the major panorama centers of production around the world. They also provide brief biographies

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<sup>24</sup> Altick, *The Shows of London*, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*. Translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997). Originally published as *Das Panorama: Die Geschichte eines Massenmediums* (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1980); Bernard Comment, *The Painted Panorama*. Translated by Anne-Marie Glasheen (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1999). Originally published as *Le XIXe siècle des panoramas* (Paris: Société Nouvelle Adam Biro, 1993).

of significant figures, including artists and businessmen, and sketch the changing nature of panoramic technology and their painted imagery over the course of the nineteenth century. These are crucial studies for this subject but are stronger when discussing European rather than American examples, for which they rely heavily for content upon newspaper anthologies like George Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage* (1927-1949).<sup>26</sup> The availability of digitized historical newspapers published throughout the United States and access to American archives made reliance upon Odell less critical to this project.

Film and media studies scholars were among the first to resurrect the circular panorama and its related forms, arguing that they laid the foundations for the later rise of moving pictures. These studies begin with the popularization of film at the turn of the twentieth century and search backward into the nineteenth century to identify the media precursors of early cinema. The evolution of panorama exhibition forms is especially compelling evidence for this connection. The static, circular panorama certainly created an illusionistic, immersive experience but eventually gave way to the literally *moving* surface of peristrepthic and moving panoramas, whose format outlined a visual narrative that was accompanied by music and a storytelling showman. Although panoramas have been overshadowed by the popular culture revolution that was film, the early works of C.W. Ceram and John Barnes established that panoramas were essential to its evolution and deserve to be recognized and understood.<sup>27</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> George C.D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 15 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927-1949).

<sup>27</sup> C.W. Ceram, *Archaeology of the Cinema*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965); John Barnes, *Precursors of the Cinema: Shadowgraphy, Panoramas, Dioramas and Peepshows Considered in Their Relation to the History of the Cinema* (Cornwall,

most significant recent contribution from this field is Erkki Huhtamo's *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (2013). Like his predecessors, Huhtamo's research answers the fundamental questions of what moving panoramas were, their physical nature as a medium, and how they fit into the nineteenth-century's "media culture in the making."<sup>28</sup> Although it must walk a fine line to avoid issues of technological determinism and the bias of historical hindsight, this scholarship raises important questions about spectator experience and the role of media in shaping it.

In contrast, the American art historians who consider the panorama have focused on the relationship between "high" and "popular art." Within the foundational scholarship in this field, the panorama was rarely discussed because of its uneasy relationship with "fine art." In the first half of the nineteenth century, the nascent American art establishment struggled to promote an arts tradition that could compete with the cultural superiority of Europe. It therefore dismissed panoramas as commercial and aesthetically inferior popular art. Despite the passage of one hundred years, American art historians relying on "American exceptionalism" had similar concerns regarding panoramas and reacted in kind.<sup>29</sup> Panoramas, intended for popular

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England: Barnes Museum of Cinematography, 1967). More recent studies born from this disciplinary perspective include: Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular," *Wide Angle* 18, no. 2 (1996): 34-69; Barbara Maria Stafford et al. *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001); Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums, and the Immersive View* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> John McCoubrey, *American Tradition in Painting* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, [1963] 2005); Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the*

exhibition and quickly produced for financial gain, did not fit the heroic narrative constructed around the American art history canon. Nevertheless, art historical studies that do incorporate discussions of the panorama have made significant contributions to our understanding of the form. They revealed its influence and that of “the panoramic view” upon American nineteenth-century landscape painting, unearthed the panoramic projects undertaken by notable artists like John Vanderlyn, and brought attention to rare surviving examples.<sup>30</sup>

The emergence of visual culture studies in the 1990s was a watershed moment for the study of panoramas. In breaking with traditional art-historical methodology and the canon, proponents of this new approach established a social art history that investigated the wider experiences of the visual world and considered the potential influence of elite and popular arts as equal. Furthermore, it gave rise to investigations of the “historically and socially shaped character of vision” that emphasized the constructed nature of sight itself and therefore its potential ideological and political

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*Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1969).

<sup>30</sup> Lillian B. Miller, “John Vanderlyn and the Business of Art,” *New York History* 32, no. 1 (January, 1951): 33-44; Lee Parry, “Landscape Theater in America,” *Art in America* 59 (Nov-Dec 1971): 52-61; Llewellyn Hubbard Hedgbeth, “Extant American Panoramas: Moving Entertainments of the Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss.: New York University, 1977); Angela Miller, *Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Kevin J. Avery. “The Panorama and its Manifestation in American Landscape, 1795-1870” (PhD diss.: Columbia University. 1995); Jessica Skwire Routhier, Kevin J. Avery, and Thomas Hardiman, Jr., *The Painters’ Panorama: Narrative, Art, and Faith in the Moving Panorama of Pilgrim’s Progress* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2015).

influence.<sup>31</sup> Rather than being an outlier to the fine art canon, panoramas now were seen as a major part of a broader world of visual production active in the construction of social values. Important examples of this work include Wendy Bellion's *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, & Visual Perception in Early National America* (2011) and Denise Blake Oleksijczuk's *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism* (2011). Bellion's study of "staged deceptions" argues that in the early national period audience encounters with high and low illusionistic art were crucial for shaping American citizens and national identity, while Oleksijczuk's focused examination of early English circular panoramas argues that the act of scrutinizing these exhibitions shaped a new public consciousness in the early nineteenth century that helped British citizens embrace emerging discourses of imperialism.<sup>32</sup>

Panorama exhibitions have had a limited presence in American historical studies, but recently have been integrated into several interdisciplinary American studies projects. John Francis McDermott's 1958 publication, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi* was the first dedicated study to examine the moving panoramas of the Mississippi that competed for spectators in the late 1840s. Likewise, the prodigious scholarship published by Joseph Earl Arrington from the 1950s through the 1980s recovered the history of several moving panoramas representing American subject

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<sup>31</sup> Patricia Johnston, ed. *Seeing High & Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1-2; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Wendy Bellion, *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, & Visual Perception in Early National America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

matter.<sup>33</sup> Their early studies, while comprehensive, retain an antiquarian fascination with the oddity of the panorama phenomenon and do not integrate them into larger conversations regarding nineteenth-century culture. In the last ten years however, several studies examining discrete topics have added panoramas to their diverse bodies of evidence, including: *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (2007), *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture, 1776-1876* (2008), and *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (2009).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi*, 1958; Joseph E. Arrington's publications include: "The Story of Stockwell's Panorama," *Minnesota History* 33, no. 7 (Autumn 1953): 284-290; "John Banvard's Moving Panorama of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (July, 1958): 207-240; "William Burr's Moving Panorama of the Great Lakes, the Niagara, the St. Lawrence and Saguenay Rivers," *Ontario History* 51 (1959): 141-162; "Otis A. Bullard's Moving Panorama of New York City," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 44 (1960): 309-35; "Lewis and Bartholomew's Mechanical Panorama of the Battle of Bunker Hill," *Old-Time New England* 52, no. 186 (Fall 1961): 81-89; "Skirving's Moving Panorama: Colonel Fremont's Western Expeditions Pictorialized," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (June 1964): 133-172; "Henry Lewis' Moving Panorama of the Mississippi River," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1965): 239-272; "Godfrey N. Frankenstein's Moving Panorama of Niagara Falls," *New York History* 49, no. 2 (April 1968): 169-199; "Panorama Paintings in the 1840s of the Mormon Temple in Nauvoo," *Brigham Young University Studies* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 193-211; Joseph E. Arrington and John F. Ohl, "John Maelzel, Master Showman of Automata and Panoramas," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 84, no. 1 (January 1960): 56-92.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); John Rogers Haddad, *The Romance of China: Excursions to China in U.S. Culture, 1776-1876* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

What has become clear to me throughout the research for this project is that, at least in the American context, these diverse discussions are built upon generalizations or assumptions about early American society and culture that themselves require historical examination. My study of American panoramas led me to question and reconsider many of these “established” facts. The history of the panorama exhibition in America truly begins with the efforts of fine artist John Vanderlyn. Does it? Panoramas were wildly popular and profitable popular attractions. Were they? American audiences preferred panoramas representing their own cities and landscapes and rivers. Did they? Prior scholarship does not lay the groundwork for consideration of panorama spectacles in the context of the history of American entertainment. It does not recover the range of American panorama producers and their motivations; grapple with the identity of their audiences and their interests; or tackle the nature of “art entertainment” as business in the nineteenth century. This dissertation addresses these questions.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

Examination of key panoramic exhibitions highlights the complex relationship these amusements had with the communities of art, business, and entertainment in antebellum America. Except for a few rare examples, most nineteenth-century American panoramas do not survive. As a result of that absence, contemporary materials such as newspapers, ephemeral advertising materials such as broadsides, souvenir pamphlets, and rare manuscript materials are the primary body of evidence utilized throughout this dissertation.

Chapter One begins by situating domestic panorama productions within the early American art economy. It reveals that panoramic exhibitions were one largely

misunderstood facet of a larger, independent, and popular art movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. This “panoramic opportunity” allowed artists to produce speculative paintings specifically for popular exhibition, in hopes of profiting from the patronage of amusement-hungry audiences. Panoramic speculations were largely the domain of “limners,” working artists who exploited any and all art opportunities available to them to make a living, in contrast to the large-scale academic and history paintings that were produced and exhibited by America’s “premiere painters.” Apart from the outlier of aspiring historical painter John Vanderlyn, whose multiple failures as a panorama painter and exhibitor were notorious, most artists who pursued the “panoramic opportunity” were tradesmen, artist-showmen, theatrical painters and aspiring professionals who risked panorama speculations in order to turn a profit. Their efforts may not have advanced the reputation of the fine arts in America, but panoramic productions, just like portrait commissions, decorative painting jobs, or engraving and print work, allowed artists to travel the unpredictable waters of the early nineteenth-century art market.

Chapter Two centers on the career of panorama showman, English architect, and explorer Frederick Catherwood, who exhibited imported topographical circular panoramas representing international cities in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia in the late 1830s and early 1840s. A surviving single-entry account book for his New York Rotunda documents all the expenses and receipts for his business from November 1, 1838 to October 31, 1841 and provides an unprecedented glimpse into the operations of an established panorama enterprise. Analysis of the account book contradicts established assumptions about American panorama exhibitions that equate popularity with profitability. Rather, a full picture of the realities of this commercial



enterprise reveals that even the most celebrated of panoramic performances, as Catherwood's panoramas of *Jerusalem*, *Thebes*, and *Rome* were, still struggled to turn a profit in the difficult economic climate of antebellum America.

Whereas the first two chapters of this project focus on the market and production of panoramic amusements in early America, the last two chapters attempt to understand their audience and what these enormous, illusionistic depictions of cities and current events might tell us about them. The first two chapters demonstrated that popularity was not an exact indicator of profitability, and by that same token, profitability (or lack thereof) should not be the only factor by which the American public's interest in panoramic subjects might be assessed. Rather than relying on these markers to determine these attractions' potential public value and significance, the case studies in chapters three and four were selected because they resonated with currents in American culture that helped to define antebellum society and the emerging middle class: their transatlantic concerns, their participation in the religious and morally motivated cult of sensibility, and their preoccupation with the deception or authenticity of spectacle and celebrity.

While the subjects of some European panoramas traveling across the Atlantic in search of new consumer markets no longer resonated with contemporary events, this was not the case with the panoramas discussed in Chapter Three. The circular *Panorama of Athens*, first produced for Englishmen Henry Aston Barker and Robert Burford's London panorama building, was in the United States within two years of its production and on exhibit, opening to the public in Boston in 1820. Over the course of the next decade it was exhibited before American audiences as news of the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832) filled American publications and inspired a flood of

public American sympathy. Following the arrival of hundreds of Polish refugees in the Spring of 1835, a peristrepic panorama of the failed “Polish November Uprising” (1830-1831) was being planned for exhibition in Baltimore. These two exhibitions are just a sampling of the panorama shows that in the first half of the nineteenth century, provided American audiences with views into global crises of revolution, riots, and revolts. Although they also acted as vehicles for “armchair tourism,” these spectacles also visualized conflicts that resonated deeply with American audiences, whose eyes and empathy were turned towards lands and people across the Atlantic. These panoramas represented not just frozen landscapes but *endangered* landscapes and peoples, deserving of American sympathy and support.

In contrast, the successful career of showman Johann Nepomuk Maelzel and the longevity of his mechanical panorama, *The Conflagration of Moscow*, exemplify not American investment in the events represented, but rather a growing fascination with celebrity, spectacle, and “humbug.” Maelzel’s *Conflagration*, a musical stage spectacle dramatized through the strategic execution of painted dioramic effects, represented the destruction of the Russian city in September 1812, during Napoleon Bonaparte’s ultimately disastrous offensive campaign. The attraction also “caught fire” with American audiences. Chapter Four explains this phenomenon by illustrating that the cultural impulses that would soon blast P.T. Barnum’s career to unprecedented heights had their first trial run in the automaton and panorama exhibition career of Maelzel. His exhibition tantalized spectators, forcing them to question the truth of what they witnessed, to consider where spectacle blurred the lines separating illusion and reality, and ultimately, taught them how to see value in deception. Although Maelzel died at sea in 1838, his spell over American amusement goes continued for

decades, and the noisy blast of Moscow's demise echoed throughout American amusement halls into the 1880s.

The dissertation concludes by contemplating the supposed "panoromania" surrounding moving panoramas after 1846. Was there a sudden surge of interest in panoramas at this time, and if so, why? Is the answer, as scholars have longed posited, that Americans had previously not cared for panoramic attractions or been particularly interested in the European subjects available on the early market? Did the moving panorama's spectacular rolling format, theatrical narrative presentation, and above all, the infusion of American subject matter into the market, lead to this "panoromania?" By bringing together the dissertation's arguments about the art market, the business of entertainment, and the transformation of amusement going audiences throughout the century, the conclusion will suggest a more measured interpretation of this final panorama phenomenon.

## Chapter 2

### “THE PANORAMIC OPPORTUNITY”: ARTIST ENTREPRENEURS AND THE EARLY AMERICAN ART MARKET

On October 1, 1829, artist Thomas Sully answered a letter written by his friend and fellow artist, John Vanderlyn. For the previous decade, Sully had operated a paintings gallery in Philadelphia with his business partner, James Earle, a frame maker. Theirs was then one of the few independent public art galleries in the United States, and Vanderlyn had reached out to inquire whether they might be interested in purchasing one of his panorama paintings to exhibit in their space. They had, after all, exhibited several large-scale paintings in the past, including Sully’s own *Passage of the Delaware* (1820). (figure 2.1) Unfortunately for Vanderlyn, Sully and Earle firmly turned down his offer. Sully, whose own earlier independent history painting exhibitions had yielded more disappointment than profit, claimed to be “disgusted” with the entire concept of public exhibitions and desired no further involvement in that kind of speculation. Furthermore, he stated bluntly that he did not have the money to pay whatever purchase price Vanderlyn had proposed, and perhaps more important, Sully claimed that he lacked the “sort of enterprise necessary to the success of such an undertaking.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Sully to John Vanderlyn, 1 October 1829, John Vanderlyn papers [ca. 1796-1890], microfilm reel 1040, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter Vanderlyn papers, AAA). For more information on Thomas Sully’s independent exhibitions and his gallery of paintings, see: Tanya Pohrt, “Touring Pictures: The Exhibition of American History Paintings in the Early Republic” (PhD

This clash between Sully and Vanderlyn highlights a philosophical difference of opinion between artists in the early nineteenth century who were mounting for-profit painting exhibitions as a strategy to support themselves. The young United States was not an environment supportive of elevated artistic pursuits. There was almost no governmental support for the arts and the patronage of private citizens was inconsistent and built primarily upon portrait commissions. These circumstances led many artists seeking to live by their palette to experiment with other means of making money. Some turned to decorative painting work; others contributed designs for engravings or pursued the print trade outright; some turned to teaching; still others, including Sully and Vanderlyn, produced speculative paintings for private commercial painting exhibitions.<sup>36</sup> However, while Sully created academic historical paintings, Vanderlyn made the less conventional choice for an artist of his caliber and pursued “the panoramic opportunity,” creating and also purchasing from other painters immense circular topographical paintings for exhibition.

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diss.: University of Delaware, 2013), 80-146; Phillip P. Fehl, “Thomas Sully’s *Washington’s Passage of the Delaware: The History of the Commission*,” *The Art Bulletin* 55, no. 4 (December 1973): 548-99.

<sup>36</sup> For more information on the nature of the early American art market and the economic realities of artist’s lives, see: Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966); Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriots: The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in the United States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Margaretta M. Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Susan Rather, *The American School: Artists and Status in the Late Colonial and Early National Era* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2016).

The subject of popular painting exhibitions outside the umbrella of early American art academies is a relatively new topic of investigation, but recent studies across disciplines have uncovered the divergent paths available to artists planning these independent exhibitions in the early nineteenth century. For example, art historian Tanya Pohrt's "Touring Pictures: The Exhibition of American History Paintings in the Early Republic," discusses the role eighteenth-century British single-picture exhibitions played in influencing American artists, including Thomas Sully, John Trumbull, Rembrandt Peale, and William Dunlap in producing their own "touring pictures" between 1815 and 1830. She argues that these exhibitions of religious, historical, or patriotic subjects were entrepreneurial yet ideologically motivated. Artists like Sully realized they could "produce meaningful history paintings on speculation" while hopefully earning compensation for their work through admission fees.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, folk culture historian Peter Benes' examination of the history of itinerancy and popular culture in early America has identified a category of early entertainer he labels "public painters," whose large-scale transparencies, popular landscape or genre paintings and indeed, panoramic exhibitions, drew the attention of sizable audiences.<sup>38</sup> Although Pohrt and Benes are discussing the same commercial exhibition phenomenon, their research discusses distinct groups of artists. Separated by training, motivation, and circumstances, Pohrt's academic painters and Benes' public painters occupied two separate tracks in the speculative painting economy.

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<sup>37</sup> Pohrt, "Touring Pictures," 3.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Benes, *For a Short Time Only: Itinerants and the Resurgence of Popular Culture in Early America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 288-299.

This division in the early American art economy makes John Vanderlyn an anomalous example of a “public painter,” a fact that is especially problematic because Vanderlyn has long been the only early American panorama painter to receive dedicated scholarly attention.<sup>39</sup> Vanderlyn was one of America’s “premiere painters,” whose European artistic training was supported by then Vice President Aaron Burr, who recognized Vanderlyn’s promise and funded his travels to France. Vanderlyn returned to the United States with neoclassical training and aspirations for an illustrious career as an academic painter, but found the America market unsupportive of his goals. As a solution to his troubles, in the mid-1810s Vanderlyn decided to build a panorama establishment in New York which he unabashedly proclaimed would earn him a healthy living and allow him “to devote his time and pencil to this and to classical subjects,” the latter being his true passion.<sup>40</sup> His New York Rotunda opened in 1818. Over the course of the next decade, Vanderlyn exhibited his own *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* and a series of purchased and rented imported European canvases. (figure 2.2) Unfortunately, his efforts in New York, and subsequent panoramic speculations in Philadelphia, Charleston, Savannah, and Saratoga Springs throughout the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s failed. Vanderlyn’s lack of

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<sup>39</sup> See for example: Lillian B. Miller, “John Vanderlyn and the Business of Art,” *New York History* 32, no. 1 (January, 1951): 33-44; John L. Marsh, “John Vanderlyn, Charleston and Panoramia [sic],” *The Journal of American Culture* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 417-429; Kevin J. Avery and Peter L. Fodera, *John Vanderlyn’s Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988); Ethan Robey, “John Vanderlyn’s view of Versailles: Spectacle, landscape, and the visual demands of panorama painting,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 12, no. 1 (2014): 1-21.

<sup>40</sup> John Vanderlyn, “To the Subscribers of the Rotunda” (New York: s.n., 1829), 2. New York Historical Society.

interest in the business beyond its potential profitability damaged his efforts; furthermore, it seems to have damaged his reputation. Following the opening of his New York Rotunda, a local newspaper commented that it was unexpected that “Mr. Vanderlyn would have left the higher department of historical painting . . . to devote his time to the more humble, though more profitable, pursuit of painting cities and landscapes.”<sup>41</sup> Although he was pursuing a similar career opportunity as his colleagues with their for-profit single-painting exhibitions, Vanderlyn’s decision to lower himself into the realm of panorama pursuits was unusual. If Vanderlyn was an anomaly in the American panorama world, then who were the “public painters” that traditionally pursued this work, and why did they chose this path?

Removing the shadow of John Vanderlyn uncovers the class of early nineteenth-century working artists who embraced the panoramic opportunity. These artists, at different stages in their careers, embraced the public exhibition path modeled around the panorama, not the academic painting, and unapologetically produced “popular paintings” intended to delight, amaze, and attract paying audiences. For these limners, panorama productions were a calculated risk, an opportunity with great potential but little guarantee of success. When European-produced examples entered the American market, the coverage they received in the American press and the public’s perceived interest encouraged local artists and artisans to speculate in their own paintings for exhibition. As a result, domestic productions or adaptations of panorama exhibitions occurred in waves, revitalized every few decades as exhibition formats evolved from circular, to dioramic, to peristrepthic panoramas. Despite the

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<sup>41</sup> *New-York National Advocate*, April 21, 1818, cited in Harris, *The Artist in American Society*.



steep time and financial investments required to exhibit these paintings, many embraced the risk of failure in pursuit of the imagined rewards they might reap.

Those who elected to pursue this path did so for a number of reasons: financial gain was of course a strong motivation but many also turned to panorama work when pursuing career advancement or independence, or when seeking publicity, hoping to spread their name and potentially cultivate relationships with future customers. The majority of their paintings were not grand artistic oeuvres intended to lift up the reputation of art in America or improve the taste of the viewing public (although some producers certainly made that argument). Rather, they were entrepreneurial pursuits unabashedly embraced by working artists negotiating the business of art in early America.

### **Respectability in Spectacle: Early American Museums and “the Panoramic View”**

Following its patenting and popularization in Great Britain, the panorama exhibition spread throughout Europe and in 1794, was brought to the United States by enterprising artists making the journey across the Atlantic. Throughout the next half century, independent exhibitions of panoramic canvases in America were sporadic at best, never settling into a predictable pattern or season but instead depending entirely on the entrepreneurial efforts of foreign and native showmen and painters. When imported canvases arrived from Europe they revitalized the public’s awareness of this amusement type and frequently reached many audiences as they toured America’s major seaboard cities, including New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston. Despite their unpredictability, the idea and appeal of this style of spectacular exhibition and “all-embracing view” persisted between exhibition dry

spells, and the notoriety and perceived success of the European imports inspired the entrepreneurial efforts of many American artists and artisans.

Panoramas and large-scale popular paintings that adopted the panorama name but not the form appealed to artist-showmen operating America's early museums. Constantly in need of new attractions and curiosities to add to their public collections throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, these showmen adopted panoramic and dioramic-inspired productions to suit their needs. This relationship is underexplored in scholarship because panoramic adaptations were not a business tactic explored by Charles Willson Peale or his sons for their museums. The elder Peale was intrigued by the science behind panoramas and explored the perspectival challenges inherent to creating a circular painting.<sup>42</sup> However, he never embraced the sheer spectacle of these immense paintings as reason enough to add them to his museum, which he treated as a sanctuary of public education. It was instead "second tier" museum proprietors who exploited the panoramic opportunity. These men operated

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<sup>42</sup> In her article "'Extend the Sphere': Charles Willson Peale's Panorama of Annapolis," art historian Wendy Bellion shows that Peale was experimenting with optical devices in the late 1780s in an attempt to achieve a circular perspective view of Annapolis from the cupola of the Maryland State House. In 1804 he even noted that his sketches were "well calculated to make a panoramo [sic]." However, he never translated his sketches into a full public exhibition, although he was certainly aware of the phenomenon. His brother in law, John DePeyster, wrote to him in May 1795 after having seen English painter William Winstanley's copy of Henry Aston Barker's *Panorama of London and Westminster* in New York. He wrote, "while we are thinking of paintings let me mention one in this City that Surpasses every thing of the kind I ever saw, it is called a panarama [sic] and Exhibits at one View the City of London, for which the Man told me he had last week Refused 800 (pounds)." Wendy Bellion, "'Extend the Sphere': Charles Willson Peale's Panorama of Annapolis," *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 3 (September 2004), 529-549; John DePeyster to Charles Willson Peale, 6 May 1795, *Peale Family Papers*, Vol. I, Lillian Miller, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 113-114.

their museums as businesses and were concerned with the financial viability of their institutions above all else. For them, panoramas filled their need for spectacles dramatic enough to attract the public but also respectable enough to maintain the veneer of gentility museums needed in order to navigate the moral minefield of popular amusements in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the late eighteenth century, popular entertainment options like public museums and panorama exhibitions were rising to prominence in a difficult environment for amusements. Nascent American museums, built upon the European model of the cabinet of curiosities, were initially conceptualized as an academic and scientific practice for ordering and proving man's mastery over the natural world. Early private collections, belonging to men like Pierre Eugène Du Simitière of Philadelphia, when opened to the public, emphasized the learned, scientific character and purpose of their institutions. With the turn of the nineteenth century however, subsequent museum proprietors learned that, as commercial enterprises dependent upon ticket sales to cover expenses, museums had to mix their collections with more popular curiosities in order to maintain the public's interest. This required museum proprietors to constantly add to the attractions they offered for public examination. Leaning too far into the realm of popular curiosities, however, could diminish the respectability of the establishment and provoke the ire of critics who opposed popular amusements on moral grounds. The panorama arrived in the United States just when this negotiation was intensifying.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 26-67; Dennett, *Weird & Wonderful*, 1-22.

The first panoramic exhibitions in the United States were in fact closely connected with nascent museum establishments and their entrepreneurial proprietors. The panorama exhibition concept was first brought to America by the artist and showman Edward Savage. Born in Princeton, Massachusetts in 1761, Savage was a largely self-taught and self-made painter whose greatest early accomplishments included painting several portraits of George Washington and a large group portrait of the hero with his family. (figure 2.3) Like other aspiring artists of the late colonial period, Savage sought to improve his skills by pursuing artistic training in Europe, and traveled to London in 1791. While abroad he studied art in London and Italy, and also learned the technique of copperplate engraving, which he used to produce and publish several portrait prints of American statesmen, including Washington and Henry Knox.<sup>44</sup>

Savage's European stay coincided with the exhibition of Robert Barker's original *Panorama of the Cities of London and Westminster*, which opened in his first London building in 1792. Three years prior, Barker had patented his original painting exhibition concept called "La Nature à Coup d'Oeil," which he described as "intended to perfect an entire view of any country or situation, as it appears to an observer turning quite round."<sup>45</sup> Although he had first exhibited a semi-circular painting of

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<sup>44</sup> Louisa Dresser, "Edward Savage, 1761-1817," *Art in America* 40, no. 4 (Autumn 1952): 157-212; Charles Henry Hart, "Edward Savage, Painter and Engraver, and his unfinished Copper-plate of 'The Congress Voting Independence,'" *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1905): 1-82; Ellen G. Miles, ed., *American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 145.

<sup>45</sup> Barker, "Specification of the Patent Granted to Mr. Robert Baker... Called by Him 'La Nature à Coup d'Oeil,'" 165-167.

Edinburgh, his London canvas achieved the full 360-degree goal of his patent. Reviews in London's popular press indicate that the exhibition was quite well received, earning praise even from the famed artist Benjamin West.<sup>46</sup>

As a new kind of visual spectacle and form of public painting, Savage clearly saw the opportunity the panorama offered to a working artist like himself and decided to mount a similar exhibition upon returning to the United States in early 1794. Furthermore, imported into the young United States, the attraction maintained a certain mystique as a European cultural product born in London and appealing for that connection to the metropole.<sup>47</sup> A six-sheet aquatint series documenting the entire expanse of Barker's London panorama was published in 1792 and likely became the source of Savage's own London panorama in the United States, which he premiered in Boston in late October 1794.<sup>48</sup> (figure 2.4) Another artist, English landscape painter William Winstanley, also traveling from London to the United States at about the same time as Savage, had the same idea. He produced his own copy of the Barker

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<sup>46</sup> Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, 99-105; Denise Oleksijczuk goes into greater detail and analysis of Robert Barker's early years exhibiting panoramas in London. Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas*, 2011; Markman Ellis, "'Spectacles within doors': Panoramas of London in the 1790s," *Romanticism* 14, no. 2 (March 2009): 133-148.

<sup>47</sup> The United State's continued cultural connection to Great Britain despite its political independence from the empire is a well-known trend in American art history and theater history. In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in the subject among American studies and Literature scholars. See for example, Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Kariann Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> "Panorama," *Boston Columbian Centinel*, October 25, 1794.

panorama and exhibited it in New York City. It however opened at least half a year after Savage's own exhibition and never toured other cities, as Savage's version did in the 1790s.<sup>49</sup>

In the four years following its unveiling in Boston, Savage's London panorama was exhibited by him in Philadelphia and Baltimore. In 1797, he sold the painting and its new proprietors traveled it to New York and later Charleston, South Carolina. During this time, the panorama's characterization as a public attraction was being negotiated by its exhibitors in each new city. In Boston, it was praised as a work of scientific triumph, its performance of perspective creating the illusion of "nature's self. The construction of the painting and the point of view in which the observer stands being such as completely to favor the delusion."<sup>50</sup> In Philadelphia however, its perspectival novelty was emphasized over its scientific appeal by the addition of the elephant Savage purchased and elected to exhibit alongside the panorama, in the same building. Perhaps in Philadelphia the painting could not draw crowds on its own, or

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<sup>49</sup> An advertisement for the resale business of "Griffin and Glass" from July 11, 1800, recorded the diverse items they had for sale at week, which included oil paints in numerous colors, Spanish sugar, old Petersburg tobacco, and "3 large rools [sic] of painting of the cities of London, Westminster, and the borough of Southwark, painted by Winstanly, and formerly exhibited at the panorama; they are in good order, and may be readily prepared for public view. They will answer very well for floor cloths." *New York Daily Advertiser*, July 11, 1800. For more on Winstanley, see J. Hall Pleasants, *Four Late Eighteenth Century Anglo-American Landscape Painters* (Worcester, MA: The Society, 1943).

<sup>50</sup> "Panorama," *Boston Columbian Centinel*, October 25, 1794; *Boston Columbian Centinel*, November 11, 1794.

the temptation of exhibiting the six foot six-inch-tall female elephant from Bengal was too much of a temptation for the enterprising Savage.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, Savage offered the London panorama for sale in 1797, when it was purchased and added to the retinue of curiosities on view at the American Museum, New York City's first public museum then operated by Gardiner Baker.<sup>52</sup> Opened in 1789, Baker maintained a collection of natural and artificial curiosities, to which over time he added wax-work figures, a full menagerie housed in lower Manhattan and, in 1797, his panorama building.<sup>53</sup> (figure 2.5) Although a costly investment for Baker, panoramas were in theory an ideal attraction to associate with his museum because

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<sup>51</sup> "The Panorama," *Philadelphia Gazette*, July 7, 1795; "The Elephant," *Gazette of the United States* (PA), August 3, 1796. The latter ads show the elephant and Savage's *Panorama of London and Westminster* on display in the building he constructed on High street, between Tenth and Eleventh streets. Elizabeth Drinker recorded visiting the elephant during its second visit to Philadelphia in her diary on November 12, 1796, writing "we walked under the covered market to avoid the wet pavements, and when in the middle of the third and last, WD. pointed to an Alley. There he said, is kept the Elephant, which is returned to the City for a Shew. I immediately concluded to see it, and we went back into a small and ordinary room, where was tag. Rag &c. No body that I knew but Abigail Griffiths, with two of her grand Children, she was in the same predicament with myself and we were pleased to see each other. The innocent, good natured ugly Beast was there, which I need not undertake to describe, only to say, that it is indeed a curiosity to make that sees it, one of the kind never having been in this part of the World before, I could not help pitying the poor Creature, whom they keep in constant agitation, and often give it rum or brandy to drink. I think they will finish it 'eer long." Elaine Forman Crane, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. II (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 860.

<sup>52</sup> "To be Sold," *Aurora General Advertiser* (NY), January 1, 1797.

<sup>53</sup> Robert M. McClung and Gale S. McClung, "Tammany's Remarkable Gardiner Baker: New York's First Museum Proprietor, Menagerie Keeper and Promoter Extraordinary," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 62 (April 1958): 143-169; Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 57-58.

they bridged the gap between rational amusement and popular curiosity. That hybridity was even praised in the local press. One reporter commented, “we rarely see objects of curiosity and improvement more completely united, than in the Panorama in Greenwich-street.”<sup>54</sup> Baker’s experience, explored more fully in Chapter 2, showed that while a fully realized panorama canvas and exhibition building could be quite costly, this singular visual experience with its European cultural cache and spectacular size and illusion, fit the bill as a simultaneously respectable and sensational museum attraction.

Thus, even as more independent panorama displays filtered into the American market in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the painted panoramic exhibition inspired a distinct genre of museum attraction. Most were not “true” panorama exhibitions in format. Rather they appropriated the term, attempting to capitalize on the respectability associated with painted productions produced on an epic scale. Traditional panoramic subject matter, including cityscapes and contemporary battle scenes, was distinct from the large-scale historical or religious paintings then beginning to enter the entertainment market as “touring pictures.” The immense “panoramic” works of public painters were not imagined as moral and aesthetic instructional tools meant to improve the uneducated public’s taste or make a point about the improving state of the fine arts in America.<sup>55</sup> Rather, they were works of popular art intended to ensnare the public’s fascination with the spectacular and,

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<sup>54</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, December 14, 1797.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Bene’s definition of “public painters” is a useful distinction that influenced the section substantially.



increasingly, with contemporary events fueling a growing nationalism among the citizens of the still new United States.

For example, fierce competition for patrons between two small-scale museums in Boston in the 1810s produced a flurry of competing “panorama views.” In 1810, Daniel Bowen, the well-known waxwork sculptor and showman, reopened his Columbian Museum on Tremont Street with a new business partner, William Doyle. Originally opened in 1795, Bowen’s museum had been one of the first in Boston, but fires had twice destroyed his collection and building. When he reopened for a third time in 1810, it was with high hopes of appeasing his creditors, a plan complicated by the arrival of a new competitor in the city.<sup>56</sup> Edward Savage, the same man who had exhibited his *Panorama of London and Westminster* at the end of the century, was now a museum proprietor himself. He had begun his showman’s career exhibiting only paintings and prints in his “Columbian” galleries opened successively in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Following the death of Gardiner Baker, Savage took on the full mantle of museum proprietor by purchasing Baker’s collection.<sup>57</sup> His New-

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<sup>56</sup> Loyd Haberly, “The Long Life of Daniel Bowen,” *The New England Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (September 1959): 320-332. For more information about Daniel Bowen’s Waxwork business, see Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, 271-287. The third fire in 1807 was particularly tragic, destroying not only Bowen’s new collection of exhibition curiosities, but also resulted in several deaths. Charles Lowell recorded in his diary, “Friday January 16 [1807], 2 o’clock in the morning, Columbian Museum took fire, & destroyed six persons killed by the falling of parts of the wall.” Charles Lowell Diaries, [1806-1813], American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>57</sup> “Columbian Exhibition of Pictures and Prints,” *Boston Columbian Centinel*, May 24, 1794; “Columbian Gallery,” *Gazette of the United States* (PA), February 20, 1796; Edward Savage, “Columbian Gallery, at the Pantheon, No. 80, Greenwich-Street near the Battery” (New York: s.n., 1802), 1-8. This rare pamphlet can be found at the Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New York Historical Society (hereafter NYHS).

York Museum opened in 1802 and remained in business eight years.<sup>58</sup> In 1810, Savage and his family returned to his home state of Massachusetts, settling in Boston where he opened his New-York Museum at Boylston Hall (later also advertised as the Boylston Museum).<sup>59</sup>

Already an experienced panorama exhibitor, once in Boston Savage developed a series of “panorama view” exhibitions to enhance his permanent museum collections.<sup>60</sup> He began with a “panorama view of the city of Rome” which he had first exhibited in New York City, “as large as nature” and likely based on prints or drawings by other artists.<sup>61</sup> He followed a similar format to create his 1815-1816 views of Constantinople and London, but his series of panorama views of Canadian cityscapes, including Montreal, Quebec and the battle of Queenstown, were certainly based in part on sketches he himself made during trips in the summers of 1806, 1807, and 1809.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *New York Mercantile Advertiser*, September 4, 1802; McClung and McClung, “Tammany’s Remarkable Gardiner Baker,” 167-169.

<sup>59</sup> “New-York Museum, Boylston Hall,” *Boston Repertory*, October 15, 1811.

<sup>60</sup> Between 1811 and 1816, Savage exhibited the following panoramic view attractions at his Boylston-Hall Museum: “Panorama View of the City of Rome”; “Panorama View of the City of Montreal”; “Panoramic View of the Battle of Queenstown”; “Panoramic View of the City of Quebec”; “Panoramic View of the Great City of Constantinople”; “View of London in the Panorama Style.”

<sup>61</sup> “New-York Museum, Boylston Hall,” *Boston Repertory*, October 15, 1811. The view of Rome also appears in advertisements for Savage’s short-lived Baltimore exhibition enterprise, alongside a “Phantasmagoria” exhibition. *Baltimore Federal Republican*, April 5, 1810; *New York Evening Post*, February 25, 1811.

<sup>62</sup> Miles, *American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century*, 145.

Surviving sketches from those expeditions show Savage documenting primarily water falls and rivers throughout the mid-Atlantic and New England, a project distinct to any he had undertaken previously. Scholars have proposed that Savage intended to publish a series of engraved landscape views based on these sketches, but it is more likely that Savage was actually preparing content for future museum attractions.<sup>63</sup> After all, an oil painting by Savage “representing the Falls on the River Chaudière, nine miles south of Quebec” based on his sketches was on display at the Boylston Museum in 1813.<sup>64</sup> (figure 2.6) Additionally, Savage advertised his “panorama view of the city of Montreal” as represented “from the mountain back of the city, about one mile distant, taken in the year 1809, by E. Savage.”<sup>65</sup> With his artistic training and panoramic experience, Savage was able to add a unique new series of attractions to his museum to tempt panorama enthusiasts. In his diary, future museum proprietor Ethan Allen Greenwood recorded visiting

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Fourteen of Savage’s sketches survive in the collections of the Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts and at the Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester. There is a precedent in this period for pictorial publications of American scenery, supporting the argument Savage was aiming to produce something similar. William Birch published his views of Philadelphia first in 1800 and 1820. John Hill published *Picturesque Views of American Scenery* based on landscape views by Joshua Shaw. However, even if that had been his ultimate goal, his sketches ultimately were only used to complete attractions to add to his museums. William Russell Birch and Thomas Birch, *The City of Philadelphia: in the state of Pennsylvania, North America* ([Philadelphia]: W. Birch, Springland Cot, near Neshaminy Bridge on the Bristol Road, 1800); John Hill, *Picturesque Views of American Scenery, 1820* (Philadelphia: Published by M. Carey & Son, 1820-21).

<sup>64</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel*, July 3, 1813, cited in Louisa Dresser, “Edward Savage,” 211-212.

<sup>65</sup> “Montreal,” *Boston Commercial Gazette*, October 4, 1813.

Savage's "view of Constantinople" at the Boylston Museum, just as he did the imported *Panorama of Paris* exhibited in the city in the same month.<sup>66</sup>

Bowen, although not an artist, did not allow Savage's museum to corner the market on "panorama views." He responded by acquiring and exhibiting several monumental print sets, published in England and depicting popular panoramas exhibited across the Atlantic. To appeal to image-hungry audiences, standard-sized prints were sometimes exhibited in early museums, on their own or later as "cosmoramas," a special wall-pocket set up that amplified the optical experience by strategic use of a viewing lenses. (figure 2.7) Bowen's new attractions were different, monumental in size and directly tied to the European panorama phenomenon.<sup>67</sup>

The most striking example of this strategy was Bowen's "interesting representation of the Great Battle, and Storming of Seringapatam," added to the Columbian Museum in 1811. The storming of the Indian fortress of Seringapatam by the British in 1799 had been the subject of a semi-circular panorama by Robert Ker Porter in the early 1800s in Britain, but it never toured the United States. (figure 2.8) However, the American public knew of its existence thanks to advertisements for the other panoramic works by Porter that arrived in the United States in the early 1800s,

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<sup>66</sup> Georgia Brady Barnhill, "'Extracts from the Journals of Ethan A. Greenwood': Portrait Painter and Museum Proprietor," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (1993): 122-124.

<sup>67</sup> In his advertisement for his paintings gallery, proprietor Michael Paff announced he was exhibiting his collection of original paintings by old masters such as Rubens and Van Dyck, an elegant landscape view valued at \$2000 by seventeenth-century Dutch painter Philips Wouwerman, and two panorama views. One was of the Storming of Seringapatam, 9 feet long, and the other of London, 11 feet long. These views were clearly being imported and valued for their size as much, if not more, for their subject matter. "Paintings," *New-York Evening Post*, January 21, 1811.

which referenced *Seringapatam* frequently, and thanks to the three-part engraving of his canvas Porter published in 1802. The three prints, side-by-side, would have stretched nearly 10 feet long. (figures 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11) Although but a fraction of the 120 feet of Porter's original painting, the prints were a faithful reproduction of the English panorama and impressive enough in scale to potentially attract curious audiences to the Columbian Museum. The prominence of the new attraction on the museum's broadsides for that year certainly suggest that Bowen hoped it would. (figure 2.12)

Unfortunately for Bowen, regardless of these plans, he was too deep in debt when he made his final attempt with the Columbian Museum in Boston. Any profits made were split with his business partner and the rest he likely relinquished to his persistent creditors. By 1815, Bowen abandoned the Columbian Museum to Doyle but nevertheless persevered, planning one final foray into showmanship. He made several changes for this new venture. Instead of creating a permanent museum he returned to the itinerant format of his waxwork exhibition days, joined with new business partner, the young artist James Kidder, and created a business model centered entirely on exhibiting "panoramic paintings."<sup>68</sup>

Bowen and Kidder's Phoenix Museum's offerings were created for popular exhibition, but they were not true panoramas in format. They were instead large, flat

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<sup>68</sup> Haberly, "Daniel Bowen," 329; Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, 274-287. Bowen announced his association with Kidder in Boston's *Columbian Centinel*, describing him as "a late pupil of Mr. J.R. Smith, a celebrated Painter and Drawing Master, of New-York." *Boston Columbian Centinel*, June 21, 1816, cited in Whitney Martinko, "'A Natural Representation of Market-Street, in Philadelphia': An Attribution, a Story, and Some Thoughts on Future Study," *Common-place: The Journal of Early American Life* 16, no. 4 (Summer 2016).

canvases that depicted urban spaces, subjects Kidder represented throughout his career both on a small scale through his aquatints and prints, and in 1816 and 1817, on a grand scale in his Phoenix Museum paintings.<sup>69</sup> He initially painted four “large and elegant” paintings for the traveling museum: “a natural representation of the harbor and city of New York,” “the Great Storm at Providence, Sept. 23, 1815,” (figure 2.13) “the Island of St. Helena, and the arrival of Bonaparte,” and “a natural representation of Market Street, in Philadelphia. (figure 2.14)

By the time they reached Philadelphia, Kidder’s works were boldly advertised as “panoramic paintings,” which may have disappointed spectators anticipating an installation and receiving instead a series of awkward flat compositions. Kidder’s paintings of Providence and Philadelphia underscore the limits of his abilities. Although he achieved a respectable elevated and receding perspective and handled the architectural details well, in adding the smaller details the compositions are less effective. This is particularly striking in the foreground figures in Kidder’s Market-Street painting. (figure 2.15) Although the market stalls recede appropriately in size into the distance, the small figures populating the space do not, the man standing with his hands clasped behind him twice the size of the shopper just steps in front of him. When examining the painting from a distance those details are forgivable, but the longer the painting was examined (and spectators were encouraged to spend an hour or more with public paintings) the more glaring its faults became.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New-York Historical Society’s Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 369 (hereafter Groce and Wallace, *Dictionary of Artists in America*).

<sup>70</sup> Whitney Martinko was the first to reattribute the painting titled “Old Court House” on display at the Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia to James Kidder, an

Ultimately, itinerancy did not suit Kidder. Although he produced one more panorama for Bowen, representing the city of New Haven and “occupying the whole of the interior semicircle, containing 340 square feet,” by 1817 Kidder abandoned the Phoenix Museum and returned to Boston, where he devoted himself primarily to print work.<sup>71</sup> Bowen continued on another year, but by 1818, he left the showman’s trade entirely, his ambitions finally crushed by years of repeated failure and disappointment. However, others took his place and found ready audiences for the most audacious of museum panorama adaptations, the “naval panoramas.”

In a market which had featured only imported battle panoramas of Napoleonic engagements, the outbreak of the War of 1812 introduced a new subject matter for public painting exhibitions. Although the conflict was fought mostly at sea and ended without a clear victor, at the time it was a flashpoint for national pride and patriotic feeling, particularly the naval battles won by America’s young navy against the globally renowned naval power of the British Empire.<sup>72</sup> Those naval victories and the exploits of their American commanders—among them Commodores Stephen Decatur,

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argument I find convincing and build upon in my discussion of Bowen and Kidder’s exhibition. Martinko, “A Natural Representation of Market-Street,” 2014.

<sup>71</sup> “Panorama of the City of New Haven,” *Philadelphia Gazette*, August 28, 1817; “Communication, Panorama of New Haven,” *Philadelphia Gazette*, September 17, 1817; Groce and Wallace, *Dictionary of Artists in America*, 369; William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, vol. 3 (Boston: C.E. Goodspeed & Co. 1918), 312.

<sup>72</sup> Since the two hundredth anniversary of commencement of the war, the War of 1812 has been the subject of renewed scholarly interest. See for example: Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

Oliver Perry, and Captain Thomas Macdonough—became ubiquitous decorative inspiration for transatlantic household goods throughout the antebellum era. Engraved prints, transfer printed earthenware ceramics, tobacco and cigar boxes, copperplate printed textiles, even reverse painted glass panels on looking glasses and banjo clocks brought America’s naval triumphs into the home.<sup>73</sup> (figure 2.16) Before that commercial explosion, however, museum-based “naval panorama” exhibitions first channeled and exploited public sentiment regarding the ongoing war through grand visual representations. These immense canvases, ten feet tall and forty feet long, created new working opportunities for America’s marine painters, and for no one more than Italian emigrant painter, Michele Felice Cornè.

Born on the island of Elba in 1752, Cornè likely trained as an ornamental painter and reportedly left the Neapolitan army just as Bonaparte’s ambitions were rising, boarding the ship *Mount Vernon* bound for Salem, Massachusetts in the year 1800. He spent his career largely based in New England, working in Salem, Boston, and Newport, Rhode Island, painting commissions without discrimination: marine and landscape scenes, portraits, decorative work such as fireboards, overmantels, and wall paper. He reportedly even drew temporary decorative chalk floor designs for ballrooms. In partnership with fellow Salem artist William King, Cornè first found a public platform for his artwork in a large-scale representation of the American *Attack on Tripoli*, an important early American naval victory during the First Barbary War

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<sup>73</sup> David A. Sperling, *The War of 1812: Timely Reflections* (Unpublished manuscript, Winterthur Library, June 14, 2008); David and Linda Arman, *Anglo-American Ceramics* (Portsmouth, RI: Oakland Press, 1998); Herbert Ridgeway Collins, *Threads of History: Americana Recorded on Cloth 1775 to the Present* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979).



(1801-1805).<sup>74</sup> Exhibited in Boston, Salem, and Providence in 1806 and 1807, Cornè's "elegant view of the Bombardment of the City of Tripoli" represented the American fleet led by Commodore Edward Preble's U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, in their August 1804 offensive against Tripoli. Although the panorama does not survive, a preparatory sketch by Cornè and two small-scale adaptations of that design highlight his careful crafting of the large canvas to create heightened visual drama.<sup>75</sup> (figures 2.17, 2.18, and 2.19) Cornè carefully planned the proportions of the scene. The measurements sketched along the bottom edge of his preparatory drawing indicate that Cornè may have intended the panorama to be as much as eighty feet long, with the American fleet on the left advancing toward the action on the right, where the Tripolitanian coast lay at the mercy of the American attack.<sup>76</sup> The Tripoli panorama, celebrated as "truly national," foreshadowed the coming War of 1812 naval panorama exhibitions, which

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<sup>74</sup> For more information on the First Barbary War, see: David A. Carson, "Jefferson, Congress, and the Question of Leadership in the Tripolitan War," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 94, no. 4 (October 1986): 409-424; Michael L.S. Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War: A History of American Relations with the Barbary States, 1785-1805* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1993); Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>75</sup> *Michele Felice Corne, 1752-1845* (Salem, MA: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1972), 16-18; Barry Arthur Greenlaw, *Michele Felice Corne* (Master's Thesis: University of Delaware, 1962).

<sup>76</sup> The advertisements for the painting say it is sixty feet long but the measurement breakdown along the bottom seems to equal eighty. The discrepancy might be accounted for due to alterations as the painting was executed.

would also allow “a real American...to behold with satisfaction...the achievements of his brave countrymen.”<sup>77</sup>

The declaration of war in June 1812 and the commencement of naval engagements with the British brought Cornè additional naval subjects to paint for public consumption. Within a month of the first major naval victory for the Americans, that of the American Frigate *Constitution* against the British Frigate *Guerriere* (in August 1812), Cornè had painted three views, 500 square feet each, of the battle, for commercial exhibition in Boston.<sup>78</sup> (figures 2.20, 2.21, and 2.22) In New England throughout the following year those views were followed by representations of the *Wasp versus the Frolic* (fought October 18, 1812), the *United States versus the Macedonian* (fought October 25, 1812), and the *Constitution versus the Java* (fought December 1812).<sup>79</sup> All were exhibited as independently touring pictures, but quickly thereafter, Cornè was hired by New York museum proprietor John Scudder for a much more ambitious, permanent attraction.

Scudder, a naturalist and amateur wildlife mounter, had opened his American Museum at 21 Chatham Street in New York in March 1810. He had previously

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<sup>77</sup> “Panorama,” *Boston Democrat*, December 10, 1806; John M. Marter, ed. *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 553-554.

<sup>78</sup> “Panorama National and Brilliant Naval Victory,” *Boston Commercial Gazette*, October 26, 1812. In 1816, many of Cornè’s designs were used to produce engravings for a popular publication, *The Naval Monument* (Boston: A. Bowen, and sold by Cummings and Hilliard, 1816).

<sup>79</sup> *New-England Palladium*, March 23, 1813; *Rhode-Island American*, August 27, 1813; *Hartford Connecticut Courant*, October 15, 1813; *Albany Argus*, November 9, 1813.

worked for Edward Savage, curating his collections in his New-York Museum, but accumulated enough capital to buy the institution as Savage prepared to return to New England. Like his mentor and other early nineteenth-century museum proprietors, Scudder maintained a variety of attractions, including over six hundred natural history specimens, wax-work displays, and lectures on the natural sciences.<sup>80</sup> In June 1813 he opened an annex to the Museum in the commercial building adjoining the Park Theatre on the city commons for his new attraction, a “panorama of naval paintings” or simply, the Naval Panorama.<sup>81</sup> Likely responding to similar traveling pictures in New England and in New York, Scudder planned not to exhibit a single picture but a “whole series of our national triumphs,” hiring Cornè, “the first marine painter of our country,” to paint them.<sup>82</sup> Scudder’s Naval Panorama opened with five paintings representing significant American single-ship naval contests with British opponents: the escape of the U.S.S. *Constitution* from the British fleet; the surrender of the British H.M.S. *Guerriere* to the U.S.S. *Constitution*; the battle between the U.S.S. *United States* and the H.M.S. *Macedonian*; the Capture of the H.M.S. *Frolic*; and the Destruction of the H.M.S. *Java* by the U.S.S. *Constitution*.<sup>83</sup> As the war progressed

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<sup>80</sup> Dennett, *Weird & Wonderful*, 17-19.

<sup>81</sup> *New York Mercantile Advertiser*, June 30, 1813.

<sup>82</sup> “Grand Naval Victories,” *New York Columbian*, December 8, 1812; *Evening Post*, July 21, 1813; *Mercantile Advertiser*, November 19, 1813; For example, George Thresher, a marine painter and art teacher in New York, also opened a “gallery of Marine Paintings of all the different actions fought between the U. States ships” on Broadway in January 1813. It seems not to have lasted long but may have given Scudder the inspiration for his own naval panorama.

<sup>83</sup> *Mercantile Advertiser*, June 30, 1813.

and more battles and victories occurred, Cornè added new representations to Scudder's collection: the "brilliant action" between the U.S.S. *Hornet* and the H.M.S. *Peacock*, the Battle between the U.S.S. *Enterprise* and the H.M.S. *Boxer*, and the Victory of American Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry on Lake Erie.<sup>84</sup> Refreshed with these additional views, the Naval Panorama remained on view throughout the war, actually outlasting the conflict and closing in April 1815.<sup>85</sup>

In a twist of fate, several of Scudder's naval paintings, en route to Charleston, South Carolina for a southern tour in late December 1814, fell into the hands of the British when the American schooner *Union* was captured by the British Frigate *Forth*. John Weiss, Scudder's partner in the southern tour, along with four other passengers and the crew were taken prisoner, the *Union's* cargo commandeered and the schooner then destroyed. Reports circulated in the press that the British crew unpacked the panorama's equipment, using its lamps to light the ship deck and laughingly playing "Yankee Doodle" from the hand organ that accompanied the exhibition. Weiss was eventually released, transferred among four British ships before landing in New-London, Connecticut and making his way back to New York. The paintings however, were lost. If the rumors were true, the *Forth's* captain intended to take them "to Halifax [Nova Scotia] and make a fortune by exhibiting them."<sup>86</sup> The "unfortunate

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<sup>84</sup> "Addition to the Historical Panorama of Naval Victories," *Mercantile Advertiser*, November 19, 1813; *New York Evening Post*, December 24, 1813; *New York Evening Post*, June 21, 1814.

<sup>85</sup> "Naval Panorama," *New York Evening Post*, April 10, 1815.

<sup>86</sup> "Our Naval Victories on Canvas All Lost," *New York Evening Post*, December 31, 1814.

capture” of the “naval victories on canvas” was mourned as an unexpected consequence of the ongoing conflict. Scudder’s attraction carried on another four months, but the capture was a “severe loss” to the enterprise.<sup>87</sup>

By the 1830s and 1840s, the growing popularity of museum exhibition halls decreased the presence of panoramic and dioramic exhibitions as semi-permanent museum installations. Instead, they became popular itinerant acts for hire at small institutions like Philadelphian Frederick Dreer’s American Museum on Chesnut and Fifth Street. His accounts show that for 1835, this kind of evening presentation, particularly the popular mechanical panorama of the *Conflagration of Moscow*, made up over seventy five percent of the museum’s gross receipts.<sup>88</sup> However, by the age of Barnum the panoramic exhibition underwent a marked change in status. For decades they been spectacular but respectable, an acceptable museum addition. However, the sudden popularization of the moving panorama and their widespread presence in urban exhibition halls redefined their place on the entertainment market. That market saturation and new steady interest among the middle class turned the panorama into a true mass culture attraction. Although museum titans like P.T. Barnum and Moses Kimball did initially commission and hire panoramic exhibitions for their institutions, they appeared less frequently in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the panorama’s popularity reached a fever pitch and this generation of museum

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<sup>87</sup> “Unfortunate Capture,” *New York Columbian*, December 31, 1814; “Scudder’s Naval Panoramas,” *New York Spectator*, June 22, 1814; John Weiss, “To the editors of the Mercantile Advertiser,” *New York Columbian*, January 4, 1815; *New York Evening Post*, January 7, 1815.

<sup>88</sup> *Frederick Dreer Cashbook, 1835-1838*. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

proprietors fought a renewed battle to establish respectability for their establishments. (figure 2.23) After midcentury however, this meant panoramas were removed from the standard museum lineup.<sup>89</sup>

### **“A Taste for Spectacular Scenery”<sup>90</sup>: Scene Painters Escape the Painting Room**

Just as the needs of the early American popular museum gave rise to domestic panoramic productions and adaptations, so too did the early American theater. The conclusion of the Revolutionary War laid the foundation for the development of a theatrical tradition in the United States, although a professional theatrical troupe performed in Williamsburg, Virginia as early as 1752. By the 1790s, the most virulent anti-theatrical laws had been lifted, allowing for the building of well-equipped theaters in the seaboard cities that would become America’s major theatrical centers, including Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Charleston. The establishment of new theaters such as the Chesnut Street Theater in Philadelphia (1793), the Federal Street Theater in Boston (1798), and the Park or “New” Theater in New York (1798) necessitated hiring in-house painters to create and maintain the scenery for new productions. It was

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<sup>89</sup> John Bouvé Clapp, *Boston Museum: the passing of an historic playhouse* (Boston: Boston Evening Transcript, 1903). P.T. Barnum commissioned one moving panorama, painted by his in-house theater painter, Signor Delamano with the assistance of assistants, including John Evers. Evers worked on the painting from August 20 to November 1, 1851 and was paid \$335 dollars. In his autobiography, Barnum also claims that in 1844, when visiting the “quinquennial exposition” in Paris, he purchased the “panoramic diorama of the funeral obsequies of Napoleon” for \$3000. John Evers Notebook, [1848-1853], The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera (hereafter Winterthur Library); Barnum, *Autobiography*, 134.

<sup>90</sup> Barnard Hewitt, “Pure Repertory: New York Theatre, 1809” *Theatre Annual: A Publication of Information and Research* IX (1951), 38.

the efforts of these artists into the nineteenth century that would transform the theater into a space of visual exhibition so popular that some painters were able to translate their theatrical acclaim into opportunity as independent panorama producers and exhibitors.<sup>91</sup>

The scenic arts in the United States, as with theater as a whole well into the nineteenth century, relied heavily on European cultural precedent, with the latest European productions imported and adapted for the American stage. Likewise, early American theaters, if they could, imported European scenery or hired British artists to establish their scenery inventory. For example, when Thomas Wignell and Alexander Reinagle began preparations to open the Chesnut Street Theater in Philadelphia, Wignell travelled to England to recruit performers and artists. He hired two painters for the theater, M.C. Milbourne and John Joseph Holland, both trained in scenic painting. Accounts by contemporaries who knew them described both as skilled artists, trained in landscape painting but well suited also to meet the demands of theatrical painting.<sup>92</sup> They were treated as members of the theatrical troupe and had

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<sup>91</sup> Susan L. Porter, *With an Air Debonair: Musical Theatre in America, 1785-1815* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 1-17; Wendy Bellion, "City as Spectacle: William Birch's Views and the Chesnut Street Theatre," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 32, no. 1 (2012), 23.

<sup>92</sup> See for example, Alan S. Downer, ed., *The Memoir of John Durang, 1785-1816* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966). In his history of the American stage, William Dunlap described Holland as follows. "In addition to Milbourne, as his scene painter, Mr. Wignell engaged the services of Mr. John Joseph Holland, whom he found at the Opera-house, London, where he had been educated for his profession. Mr. Holland was still a young man, although married, and with his wife, arrived in 1796 in New-York. Holland has often laughed at his profound ignorance of the country to which he was emigrating, an ignorance which is perpetuated as far as possible to this day by the efforts of the government, or at least those writers who have the sanction of the government and the confidence of the people." Dunlap knew Holland well as in

several responsibilities. They maintained and updated the stock scenery kept for and interchanged between performances, and also designed and painted new scenery as needed.<sup>93</sup> It was these foreign-born artists who contributed substantially to the design of the early national American stage and trained the subsequent generation of American-born artists working within and beyond the theatre.<sup>94</sup>

Panoramic exhibitions as independent attractions were heavily influenced by the scenic effects and illusions born in the theater. They developed a symbiotic relationship with stage-based spectacles, drawing inspiration from them and in turn influencing advancements in scenic design once panoramas became common amusements.<sup>95</sup> For example, the French painter Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, inspired by his work as a stage designer and painter in London, in 1781 invented the “Eidophusikon,” a mechanical display of moving pictures exhibited as an independent

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1815, they became co-managers of the New-York (or Park) Theater in New York City. William Dunlap, *A History of the American Theatre* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832), 191; 361.

<sup>93</sup> The surviving records of the Federal Street Theater in Boston give a detailed picture of their proposed inventory of stock scenery in 1798, to be painted by Antony Audin, Jr. It included: a palace, forest, street, garden, prison, a rustic house, library, “room,” a cave, and back scenes of the rooms and forest. Boston Theater (Federal Street) Records, Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Boston Public Library (hereafter BPL).

<sup>94</sup> John R. Wolcott, “Apprentices in the Scenic Room: Toward an American Tradition in Scenic Painting,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre Research* 4, no. 1 (1976): 24-39; Bellion, “City as Spectacle,” 17-18.

<sup>95</sup> For more information on the influence of panoramic spectacles in American theater scenery, see Richard Carl Wickman, “An Evaluation of the Employment of Panoramic Scenery in the Nineteenth-Century Theatre,” (PhD diss.: The Ohio State University, 1961).



attraction. In turn, the Eidophusikon is credited as a media precursor to the circular panorama exhibition.<sup>96</sup> Painted transparencies and dioramas, which altered in appearance based on the specific application of light, appeared both on stage and off, and transparencies outside the theater became popular decorations for festive events in early America.<sup>97</sup> Moving or “peristrepthic” panorama displays also got their start on the stage, before graduating to independent exhibitions and subsequently returning as stage scenery when the independent exhibitions rose in popularity.<sup>98</sup> For the nineteenth-century public then, the dividing line between theatrical spectacle and

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<sup>96</sup> Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, 95-99.

<sup>97</sup> Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, 288-291. Transparency painting provided working artists with additional employment and artist’s accounts frequently record transparency commissions. For example, Bass Otis’s account book covering primarily his portrait work from 1812 to 1861, records at least three transparency jobs. Furthermore, as evidenced by the detailed instructions for transparency painting included in nineteenth century carriage and house painting manuals, these commissions for public celebrations were likely also sought by painters working in artisanal trades. P.J. Rousseau, *Rousseau’s complete theory and practice in house, sign, and carriage painting* (Buffalo: Press of Haas, Nauert & Co., 1875), 139-166; Thomas Knoles, “The Notebook of Bass Otis, Philadelphia Portrait Painter,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 103, (April 1993).

<sup>98</sup> An early example is William Dunlap’s 1828 play titled *A Trip to Niagara, or Travelers in America: A Farce in Three Acts*, that included a “moving diorama” of eighteen scenes depicting a steamboat trip on the Hudson river from New York City to its landing at Catskill. In 1837, after the popularization of peristrepthic panoramas in the United States, the Front-street Theater in Baltimore performed *The Battle of Algiers*, whose last scene was a “grand peristrepthic Panorama! Painted on 2,000 yards of canvas.” Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, 173; Samuel Shanks, “Rooting Out Historical Mythologies: William Dunlap’s *A Trip to Niagara* and its Sophisticated Nineteenth Century Audience,” *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 27, no. 2 (2015): 1-15; *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 12, 1837.

independent panoramic spectacle was narrow.<sup>99</sup> That fluidity benefited the scenic artists working in the theater, who could turn their knowledge of the public's fascination with the visual spectacle on the stage into opportunity outside the painting room. An artist just had to be ambitious enough to take the risk and make the leap.

John Joseph Holland, along with his assistant, Hugh Reinagle, did just that. In 1807, after a decade with the Chesnut Street Theater, Holland left for New York City to take over architectural and scenery design for the Park Theater, bringing with him both Milbourne and Reinagle.<sup>100</sup> Holland quickly rose in the esteem of the local community, and was praised in public both for his improvements to the theater's interior and for the scenic designs his team produced for shows like *Cinderella* and the *Melodrama of Tekeli*. As was done with respected performers, Holland was rewarded for his scenic skills at the end of the theatrical season with benefit performances in his honor, the proceeds from which were gifted to him. For his 1809 benefit, Holland designed scenes featuring topographical views of New York City. The enthusiastic reception they received more than likely indicated to him a market for that imagery beyond the stage.

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<sup>99</sup> In her article *The City as Spectacle*, Wendy Bellion proposes interpreting the theater as an important early and under recognized space for visual exhibition and play, and idea that is very influential here.

<sup>100</sup> Located on Park Row along the New York Commons (what is now City Hall Park), the theater was originally built in 1798 and managed by William Dunlap until 1805. Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre*, 1832; Joseph Norton Ireland, *Records of the New York Stage: From 1750 to 1860*, vol. I (T.H. Morrell, 1866); Martha J. Lamb and Mrs. Burton Harrison, *History of the City of New York*, vol. 1 (New York: A.S. Barnes Company, 1896), 556-557.

“Mr. Holland’s Benefit” featured three performances over the course of the evening. (figure 2.24) First was *Spanish Patriots*, a new piece that honored the Spanish soldiers then fighting against Napoleon Bonaparte’s attempts to conquer Spain. This was followed by a comedy, *John Bull, or the Englishman’s Fire Side*, and finally, the evening concluded with a newly written pantomime, *Harlequin Panattahah, or the Geni of the Algonquins*.<sup>101</sup> It was for this final piece that Holland created new scenery and decorations, including several large-scale representations of sites around New York City that his audience would recognize including a view of the Battery, a wharf on the North River, and “a view of the New City-Hall, as it will appear when finished.” The pantomime itself, a popular form of light-hearted, comedic performance, was well received by reviewers, but they also made it clear they understood the performance as a whole was intended primarily “as a vehicle to the elegant and judicious scenery of the artist.”<sup>102</sup>

Following the success of his benefit and his New York views for the stage, Holland took a risk and embarked on a project to create a full-scale circular panorama of New York City. With Reinagle’s assistance, in the theater off-season they painted the 25-foot-tall, 168-foot-long canvas based on sketches taken from the roof of the Park Theater. The painting, which was exhibited in a specially prepared building on the corner of Broadway and Leonard Street, opened to the public in December 1809 and remained on view nearly two years. (figure 2.25) The view, despite the panoramic form’s purported dedication to hyperrealism, was a visual construction, a fact readily

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<sup>101</sup> “Mr. Holland’s Benefit,” *New York Evening Post*, June 25, 1808.

<sup>102</sup> *American Citizen* (NY), January 5, 1809.

admitted by Holland in a detailed description of the panorama printed to accompany the painting. (figure 2.26) “The artist has been necessarily compelled to use liberties, and by leaving out a tree where it obscured the view and changing others from formal rows into irregular groups, made the whole more picturesque, but a little less correct.”<sup>103</sup> It is in Holland’s selective choices for representing and describing the city that his now lost canvas’s significance to the young nation becomes clear.

The city and community Holland captured in his urban cityscape was one still very much scarred by the Revolutionary War, whose memory was still fresh and whose marks still dotted the landscape. From the elevated perspective of the theater’s roof, Holland depicted the surrounding streets and buildings in detail, and in his pamphlet recorded the associations burned into them. Across the canvas the city’s churches were highly visible, their high spires breaking the horizon line. (figure 2.27) The pamphlet identified such structures as the Fourth Presbyterian Church, which had been “prostituted by the British army to military purposes” during the war.<sup>104</sup> Government buildings and private residences, taking on new life postwar under the control of the city’s “rightful inhabitants,” were still remembered for their former associations with British sympathizers and traitors, including merchant William Axtell, notorious jailer William Cunningham, and judge Thomas Jones.<sup>105</sup> Despite

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<sup>103</sup> [John Joseph Holland], *A Description of the Panorama, Representing the City and Environs of New-York* (New-York: Printed by David Longworth, [1809]), 15. This rare pamphlet can be found in the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 17, 20. All three loyalists are mentioned by name in the pamphlet along with the buildings they were associated with. Axtell’s townhome on Broadway across from the City Commons was confiscated after the war and was later the residence of Aaron Burr. Cunningham’s work during the war as keeper of the Provost behind the

those remembered traumas, Holland celebrated also the growth and resilience of the city and its residents in his panorama. Sites on and off the island such as Hudson Square and the new “city of Jersey” across the river were shown in the process of expanding, becoming future ornaments of the city and its environs. Attention to the architectural details of the city’s buildings emphasized the sophistication of its culture, none more so than the New City Hall in the Park. As with the earlier theater scenery, Holland showed the park as it “might be,” featuring the City Hall then still under construction in its imagined completed form. (figure 2.28) The construction of the building was a turning point for New York City, a fact Holland celebrated by emphasizing the building and “the importance which a city derives from the splendor of its public buildings, and the credit which is reflected thereby on the munificence, and liberality of its governing councils.”<sup>106</sup>

The panorama gave its spectators command of the city, creating a picturesque order that displayed it, along with its imagined prosperous future, to the best advantage.<sup>107</sup> At least one commentator in a local newspaper, following his visit to the

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debtor’s prison was infamous, as was the “the barbarity exercised by him towards the American prisoners who fell within his gripe [sic].” Jones’s estate, Mount Pitt, was also confiscated and later opened as a public house. For more information on American Loyalists in New York and their treatment during and after the war, see Ruma Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City during the Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011) and Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>107</sup> At the time a similar project was being undertaken by the city government through the Commissioners Plan of 1811, a mapping project that took ownership of the northern reaches of Manhattan Island by projecting an imagined urban grid over the lands not yet settled. For more information, see: Mona Domosh, *Invented Cities: The*

panorama, described the “glow of pleasure” he felt when examining it and praised the exhibition as “an ornament to the city.”<sup>108</sup> With the apparent success of their New York view, Holland and Reinagle created one more, a complete circle panorama of Boston. Like the New York view, it emphasized the marks of the recent revolution on the city, which in Boston could be found in greater numbers “within the same compass [than] in any other part of the United States.”<sup>109</sup> (figure 2.29) In total, Holland’s career as a panorama painter and exhibitor lasted only the better part of three years. Notices for his Boston panorama disappeared in February 1812.<sup>110</sup> Rather than trying to travel the canvases to other cities, Holland advanced his theatrical career in New York. In 1812, he left the Park Street Theater for the Olympic Theater on Broadway and Anthony Streets, where he ascended to the position of manager. Holland remained there until his death in 1820, having built his career feeding the “public’s appetite for spectacular scenery” both on and off the stage.<sup>111</sup>

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*Creation of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century New York & Boston* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>108</sup> “To the Editors of the Mercantile Advertiser,” *New York Mercantile Advertiser*, August 13, 1810.

<sup>109</sup> “Boston Panorama,” broadside. New York, NY, ca. 1811, NYHS; “Boston Panorama,” *New York Evening Post*, October 3, 1811. By February 1812 the panorama no longer had dedicated evening viewing hours and was only open from 10 until 4 pm. Evening illuminations would only be performed upon special request.

<sup>110</sup> Newspaper reports from March 1812 also indicate that an act of arson at the Panorama building on the corner of Broadway and White Street likely cemented the fate of Holland and Reinagle’s enterprise. *Commercial Advertiser*, May 4, 1812.

<sup>111</sup> Hewitt, “Pure Repertory: New York Theatre, 1809,” 38.

Not all early American scenic painters were recruited directly into positions in the theater. Others, like Boston's John Worrall, worked their way up to the post of scenic painter and used forays into public painting exhibitions to bolster their reputation and income. Very little is known of Worrall's early life, but he was described as an English painter at the time, so he likely emigrated. By 1806 he was settled in Boston and pursuing work with the Federal Street Theater. He leased a dwelling house adjoining the theater's box office, which he occupied with his young daughter. Although he is not listed as the theater's scene painter until 1810, the theater's business records and Boston newspaper notices show he had begun working for the theater in numerous capacities at least three years prior. Worrall and his daughter were both occasional performers on stage, he known for comedic turns as Harlequin with his daughter a "little fairy" who stole "with printless [sic] feet into the hearts of the whole town."<sup>112</sup> He also performed odd jobs around the theater when requested: he was paid for inventorying the house props and scenery, for cleaning the cellar, and for utilitarian painting of rooms and doors in the theater. Worrall's first scenery designs in Boston appear in advertisements in late 1807 for the pantomime spectacle, *Cinderella*. However, his acclaim as scenic painter and artist was on the rise by the 1809-1810 theatrical season, when he appears to have been hired permanently by the theater and honored with his first benefit, described in the local press as "seldom announced unless it be for a lady or gentlemen whose great talent or utility

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<sup>112</sup> "Mr. and Miss Worrall's Benefit," *Boston Commercial Gazette*, May 1, 1809.

fully entitles them to the patronage of the town.” It is at this high point in his career that Worrall made the leap to independent panorama exhibition.<sup>113</sup>

In partnership with John Rubens Smith (1775-1849), a local artist then working as a drawing master, Worrall painted a panorama of Boston and its vicinity, exhibited in a separate space on Marlborough Street, just a few blocks from the Federal Street Theater.<sup>114</sup> (figure 2.30) Finding a suitable elevated sight from which to represent the city, along with the mechanical requirements of the circular panorama format challenged the artists. Their panorama pictured Boston from the tower of the Old South Meeting House on Marlborough Street, but as they readily admitted in their broadside for the attraction, it was neither an uninterrupted view nor a complete circle. Rather, circumstances had demanded they separate the picture into two separate canvases, facing north and south respectively. Although they admitted that a more complete view of the city could have been achieved from the State House, they argued its altitude diminished the detail with which they could represent the city’s major landmarks and prevented them then from including the State House itself in the panorama, “an omission that would have deprived the town of that commanding

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<sup>113</sup> One-year lease from Trustees of house near Theatre box office to John Worrall, August 1806; Receipt of payment for inventorying goods at Theater to John Worrall, July 1807; Receipt of payment for cleaning theatre cellar to John Worrall, July 1807; Receipt of payment by Treasurer for painting to John Worrall, November 1807, Boston Theater (Federal Street) Records, BPL; Groce and Wallace, *Dictionary of Artists in America*, 703; “Boston Theater,” *Boston Democrat*, December 26, 1807; “Mr. and Miss Worrall’s Benefit,” *Boston Commercial Gazette*, May 1, 1809.

<sup>114</sup> Map of Boston in the state of Massachusetts: 1814. John Groves Hales and Thomas Wightman. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division; Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, 292-293.



appearance such a building undoubtedly gives it.”<sup>115</sup> The physical division of the scenery across two separate stretches of canvas broke the horizon and detracted from the illusion of the presentation, but was an adaptation suited to Worrall’s training as a theater painter. The two independent sections likely approximated the size of a theatrical drop curtain for the stage, ten feet tall or more and likely at least twenty-five feet long. The total stretch of painted canvas in the Smith and Worrall panorama was no less than 1000 square feet.

Although the Boston panorama does not survive, a contemporary “panoramic view” theater drop curtain painted by Worrall of the east side of Providence illustrates his topographical painting style and adaptation of his scenic training for his panoramic presentations.<sup>116</sup> Although Worrall was associated with Boston’s Federal Street Theater throughout his career, during the off-season he traveled to other towns in the region and took work with their theaters. In 1812 he was painting for the Providence Theater and produced for them a *Grand Panorama View of the town of Providence*.<sup>117</sup> (figure 2.31) His view of the east side of Providence is suited for its exhibition in the theater, framed by an imagined proscenium with classicizing arches and colored marble columns. It is systematically taken but many of the buildings are indistinct

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<sup>115</sup> “A Panorama of Boston,” broadside. Boston, 1810. Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter MHS).

<sup>116</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, painted drop curtains increasingly replaced flats as back scenes, and were framed and lifted into the theater’s overhead loft. Porter, *With an Air Debonair*, 123.

<sup>117</sup> Charles Blake, *An Historical Account of the Providence Stage: Being a Paper Read Before the Rhode Island Historical Society* (G.H. Whitney, 1868), 71, 116-118, 141-142.

rectangular structures depicted in a flattened perspective, except for the most distinct and recognizable edifices then in the city: the First Baptist Meeting House, representing at left just beyond the river (figure 2.32), the red brick structure of Brown University at center in the distance, and the twin spires of the First Congregational Church, on the hill to the right of the College.<sup>118</sup>

The curtain, which was first exhibited in July 1812 at the Providence Theater following a performance of *Fortress, or Father Restored*, was painted in oil colors, an unusual medium for theatrical painting, which was usually done in distemper.

Distemper, which bound ground paint pigments with water and size (a binder derived from animal hide or glue rather than oil), was less expensive and dried faster than oil, making it a cost and time effective choice for the demands of theatrical painting.<sup>119</sup>

That Worrall used oil paints for his Providence drop curtain and potentially then also the Boston panorama indicates he conceptualized these projects as distinct from his standard scenery work for theatrical productions. He invested the additional cost and time it took to paint in oil on a large scale, elevating his panoramic works. When moving panoramas rose to popularity, panoramacists working in oil would echo

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<sup>118</sup> Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., *American Paintings in the Rhode Island Historical Society* (Providence: The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1974), 36-37.

<sup>119</sup> James Ayres, *Art, Artisans & Apprentices: Apprentice Painters and Sculptors in the Early Modern British Tradition* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 249; Christine Hadsel, *Suspended Worlds: Historic Theater Scenery in Northern New England* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 2015), 10-22; F. Lloyds, *Practical Guide to Scene Painting and Painting in Distemper* (London: George Rowney & Co., 1880), 18.

Worrall's material distinction to differentiate their "superior" products from those created using distemper, which became common by midcentury.<sup>120</sup>

Like Holland in New York City, following the conclusion of their panorama exhibition in Boston, Smith and Worrall elected not to attempt to tour the painting to other cities due to their "professional engagements" in Boston.<sup>121</sup> Following an apparently unsuccessful attempt to sell the panorama in December 1810 and the production of panoramic view drop scenes for the Providence Theater and also the theater in Portland, Maine, Worrall retired from the panorama production business.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> John Vanderlyn's *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* was painted in oil on canvas, likely emulating the example of early European examples. This material distinction was a problem for the artist and panorama proprietor Robert Burford at his London panorama well into the 1840s, when competition for his Leicester Square building was increasing. In the descriptive pamphlet for his second *Panorama of Athens*, on view in 1847, he wrote, "Mr. Burford feels it his duty to state, as an erroneous impression is entertained by some portion of the Public that the Panoramic Views are a species of scene-painting, coloured in distemper, or other inferior manner; that such is not the case – they being all painted in the finest oil colour and varnish that can be procured and in the same manner as a gallery picture." *A Description of a View of Athens and the Surrounding Country, Now Exhibiting at The Panorama, Leicester Square* (London: Geo Nichols, Earl's Court, Leicester Square, 1847).

<sup>121</sup> Smith continued teaching in Boston until 1814, when he moved to Brooklyn and established a drawing academy. During the 1830s he established a similar school in Philadelphia, but he died in New York in 1849. His son, John Rowson Smith (1810-1864) was also an artist and in the 1840s, achieved great fame as a moving panorama painter with a panorama of the Mississippi. Groce and Wallace, *Dictionary of Artists in America*, 589. For more on John Rowson Smith, see: John Francis McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>122</sup> "Rare Chance!!!," *Boston Repertory*, December 14, 1810; A "panorama view of the Town of Portland, taken from Mr. Moody's house" and painted by Mr. Worrall was first advertised at Portland's Union Hall during a theatrical presentation. *Weekly Eastern Argus* (ME), August 8, 1820. James L. Garvin, *Creating Portland: History*

However, there is evidence that throughout the rest of his career, he did return to publically exhibiting popular paintings, but ones he purchased specifically for that purpose. For example, in 1817, Worrall advertised the exhibition of Boston artist Henry Sargent's *Grand Historical Picture of the Entrance of Jesus Christ into the City of Jerusalem*. He reportedly paid \$3000 for the picture and may have reaped as much in profits by charging 25 cents to view it in a room on Boston's Tremont Street.<sup>123</sup> In 1820, following its exhibition in New York and Charleston (suburban Boston), Worrall purchased the imported *Panorama of the Battle and City of Paris*, painted in London by Henry Aston Barker, the son of Robert Barker.<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately, any plans he may have had to mount a new panorama exhibition in Boston or greater New England were dashed in January 1821, when a fire broke out in the Federal Street Theater's painting room, housed in a wooden structure just outside the main building on Theater Alley. The fire was reported in the local press. "Besides the loss which the

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*and Place in Northern New England* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2005).

<sup>123</sup> "Grand Historical Picture of the Entrance of Jesus Christ into the City of Jerusalem," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, January 4, 1817. William Dunlap in *Rise and Progress of the Arts* wrote that Sargent's "Christ Entering Jerusalem" was "a popular picture. It was remarkable for variety in the expression of the countenance of the hosanna-crying multitude. The face of the Saviour is wonderfully fine... The Jerusalem was sold for \$3000, and as much was received for the exhibition. It is probably ruined by travelling with its owner." Dunlap, *Rise and Progress*, vol. II, 63; Sargent's most well known genre paintings, *The Tea Party* and *The Dinner Party* were both also purchased by a Boston based artist and painting exhibitor, David L. Brown, and exhibited in Boston for an exhibition fee in a room at 2 Cornhill Square adjoining his drawing academy beginning in 1821. For more information on Henry Sargent, see: Jane C. Nylander, "Henry Sargent's *Dinner Party* and *Tea Party*," *Magazine Antiques* 121, no. 5 (May 1982): 1172-1183.

<sup>124</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 6, 1820.

Managers have sustained in the destruction of much useful and valuable scenery,” Mr. Worrall suffered the most due to the destruction of the “two admirable and much celebrated Panoramas, of the *Battle of Paris*, and *Picture of Paris*, by Barker.”<sup>125</sup> Although the press mistook the panorama as two separate canvases, they accurately reported Worrall’s financial loss with the destruction of the painting. It was more than likely his final foray into public exhibition before his death in 1825.<sup>126</sup>

Working artists like Holland, Reinagle, Worrall, and Smith played a significant, if under recognized role in the early American art economy and were appropriately positioned to benefit from the risk of art showmanship. They possessed the training essential for painting on a large scale and, at high points in their theatrical careers, made calculated speculative leaps to independent panorama production and exhibition. Although their ties to local theaters prevented them from pursuing audiences beyond their primary place of residence, the artistic clout they had developed within the local cultural sphere assured them that the community who appreciated their contributions on the stage would likely support their “scenic” endeavors beyond it. The next generation of theatrical painters, including Holland’s student John Evers, likely learned from the panoramic experiences of their teachers, but were able to apply that knowledge in a different art market, one where the moving

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<sup>125</sup> “Fire!,” *Boston Commercial Gazette*, January 22, 1821; *Boston Repertory*, January 23, 1821.

<sup>126</sup> *Boston Columbian Sentinel*, September 17, 1825, cited in *Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society*, vol. 1 (Providence, RI: The Society, 1893), 67.

panorama craze of the mid-1840s created high demand for painters who could paint quickly and on a large scale.<sup>127</sup>

### **Young, Immigrant, and Entrepreneurial “Public Painters”**

Finally, for some individuals with artistic aspirations, turning to panoramic production was less about financial gain and more about taking advantage of a highly visible platform for self promotion. Especially for a younger or unknown artist, painting commissions were not guaranteed because the public was unfamiliar with their abilities. Convincing prospective patrons to visit a painter’s room was a slow and potentially costly way to build a reputation, but a project as spectacular and public as a panoramic exhibition could act as a platform to launch an artist’s reputation and establish the foundation for their future career.

In 1829, Richard R. Gibson (ca. 1795-1856), a young artist aspiring to professional status, embarked on a well-publicized effort to complete and exhibit a full-scale, circular panorama of Quebec. He partnered with a man named Athans Ford, an entrepreneur who the year before had built two Rotunda buildings for the purpose of exhibiting panoramas. One was in Washington D.C. on the corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and Pennsylvania Avenue, the other in Baltimore on North Calvert Street. Gibson was unknown and just starting out as a professional artist. He was essentially self taught, but had made a crucial connection with Joseph Wood, a reputable portrait and portrait miniature painter who split his time between Baltimore and Washington D.C. in the 1820s and 1830s. That connection would be crucial for Gibson. In the weeks leading up to the opening of the *Panorama of Quebec* in Washington D.C., Wood wrote a

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<sup>127</sup> John Evers Notebook, [1848-1853], Winterthur Library.

remarkable series of testimonials about “Mr. Gibson, the Painter,” that were published in the local press and also in Baltimore.<sup>128</sup>

Wood’s bombastic written testimonials stoked public interest not only in Gibson’s *Panorama of Quebec*, but also in him. Wood described Gibson as a native genius, a self taught artist who Wood had known since he was a school boy and who, “by his own natural talents, kindled that genius within him, met all the adversities of this life, and with all his amenity, which he is so gifted with, mounts the summit of his profession.”<sup>129</sup> This was a powerful claim at a time when many young men launched careers based on their wits. Wood also attested to the intellectual character of Gibson’s skill. He was no simple technician, but since youth particularly fond of and skilled in “Historical painting, which some of his pieces shew [sic] in his more youthful days, which he designed and which have been preserved.” Although Gibson was a young artist “hitherto ‘unknown to fame,’” Wood proclaimed that his *Panorama of Quebec*

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<sup>128</sup> Groce and Wallace, *Dictionary of Artists in America*, 257; Virgil E. McMahan, *Washington D.C. Artists Born Before 1900: A biographical directory* (Washington: McMahan, 1976), 27; J. Hall Pleasants, *Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Painting in Maryland* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1945), 40. Athans Ford was the exhibitor, but likely not the painter, of two large scale attractions in 1828: a panorama of the falls of Niagara and a panorama of West Point. The panorama of Niagara Falls likely was a full circular canvas, said to contain nearly 5000 square feet of canvas, painted in oils, and occupying the full circumference of the Rotunda, 220 feet. In contrast, the picture of West Point was exhibited “as a transparency,” supposedly painted in oil colours upon 1500 square feet of “Cambrick,” (likely a light, thin linen or cotton) and transformed by the power of Gas light. The transparency was only exhibited at night. *Baltimore Patriot*, August 3, 1829.

<sup>129</sup> “Mr. Gibson, the Painter,” *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, September 15, 1829.

would soon remedy that, promising that “a cloudless noon of substantial fame and pecuniary comfort, after his morning of adversity, awaits him.”<sup>130</sup>

Wood also reassured the public that Gibson’s panorama was both a true example of the exhibition form and a testament to America’s national past. Gibson had taken the sketches himself, eleven in total, to complete the 360-degree circle, in ten days from the deck of a ship in the St. Lawrence River. The view captured the whole of the city of Quebec and the plains of Abraham, the upper and lower towns with their fortresses, battlements, and bustle of business. Beyond reproducing an exact representation, Gibson also imbedded the panorama with reminders of the significance of Quebec in shaping the future of the young United States. It was the site of the decisive Battle of Quebec, where Wolfe and Montcalm clashed, the British prevailing despite the death of General Wolfe, famously immortalized by Benjamin West. (figure 2.33) It was also the hallowed ground where General Richard Montgomery had died early in the Revolutionary War. Based on the advertisements, it appears that Gibson may have even inserted references to Montgomery’s “death scene,” the subject of a history painting by John Trumbull in 1786, into the panorama. (figure 2.34) Finally, Wood related the veracity of the panorama’s illusion through two anecdotes involving animals deceived by the painting. The first, a bird, had flown into the Washington D.C. Rotunda while Gibson painted the panorama and attempting to escape, made to fly towards the sky, only to strike the canvas instead. The second centered around a Spaniel water dog who, having visited the panorama with his owner while it was on

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<sup>130</sup> “Panorama of Quebec,” *Washington Daily National Journal*, August 25, 1829; “Mr. Gibson, the Painter,” *Washington Daily National Journal*, August 25, 1829; *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, September 3, 15, 1829; June 10, 1830.



exhibition in Baltimore, perceived the St. Lawrence river as reality and tried unsuccessfully to jump in for a swim.<sup>131</sup>

The *Panorama of Quebec* was only on view in the mid-Atlantic through 1830, when Ford sold it, his *Panorama of Niagara*, and the Baltimore Rotunda building.<sup>132</sup> For Gibson, however, it seems to have accomplished exactly what he intended, putting his name before the public to advance his career. Although he never became an artist of national reputation, Gibson was able to open the first art academy in Washington D.C. in 1832, where he taught painting and drawing until just before his death in 1856.<sup>133</sup>

For aspiring landscape artist Henry Cheever Pratt (1803-1880), occasional public panoramic turns during his career were carefully timed, selected to provide him with exposure and experience in his preferred artistic genre. From a young age, Pratt's artistic talent was nurtured by the Boston-based artist and inventor Samuel F.B. Morse, who took Pratt on as a student and assistant in 1817, instructing him in painting in both crayon and oil. While Pratt accompanied Morse on several trips to the south in the early 1820s, by 1823, at just twenty years old, he began branching out on his own. Seeking painting commissions and patrons, Pratt took several extended

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<sup>131</sup> *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, September 3, 1829; "The Power of Painting," *Eastern Argue* (ME), June 18, 1830.

<sup>132</sup> "Auction Sale," *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, September 3, 1830.

<sup>133</sup> McMahan, *Washington D.C. Artists*, 27; Richard Gibson will, 1856, Boxes 23 Baucher – Box 27 Fischer, 1854-1859, Washington D.C., Wills and Probate Records, 1737-1952. Ancestry.com.

independent trips to small New England towns close to Boston, including one to Providence, Rhode Island, where he lived for most of 1824.<sup>134</sup>

Pratt set up temporary painting rooms in a boarding house on Westminster Street, where he offered to paint portraits of anyone who might honor him with their patronage. However, his advertisements made it clear that he was eager to paint landscapes as well, announcing that “Mr. P. will paint any particular views of scenery about Providence, if applied to for that purpose.” (figure 2.35) Even if portrait commissions likely took up the majority of his time, he did practice his landscapes, evidenced by the “one large landscape, 5 feet long by 3 ½ feet wide” that he offered to sell on reasonable terms that April. As with most itinerant painting trips, Pratt moved on and returned to Boston once his opportunities diminished in Providence. However, he did stay through Brown University’s commencement festivities in August 1824, when he exhibited his most ambitious and commercial creation.<sup>135</sup>

That week, Pratt opened for exhibition a *Panorama of Providence*, likely a large flat painting on canvas, perhaps 10-feet-tall and 20-feet-wide, at the Union Buildings. It included a view “of the whole town, and some of the adjoining country,” which Pratt had sketched from the house of John P. Jones on Market Street, a central location from which he could see the vast majority of the city when looking towards

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<sup>134</sup> Dunlap, *Rise and Progress*, 171; Groce and Wallace, *Dictionary of Artists in America*, 515; Goodyear, *American Paintings in the Rhode Island Historical Society*, 55; Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. and Melissa Renn, *American Paintings at Harvard: Paintings, Watercolors, and Pastels by Artists Born before 1826* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 403-404.

<sup>135</sup> “Portrait and Landscape Painting,” *Rhode-Island American*, January 6, 1824; “H.C. Pratt,” *Rhode-Island American*, April 20, 1824.

the southeast. (figure 2.36) Monumental in size and of interest to the local community, Pratt timed his exhibition to exploit the festivities of Brown University's Commencement, scheduled for September 1 and traditionally a popular day for university communities to indulge in commercial amusements.<sup>136</sup> Exhibited only that week, Pratt may have reaped a final profit from the citizens of Providence with his panorama, which the local press described as a "highly finished performance" and a fine picture, thanks to its minute accuracy as a delineation of the town and more generally, as "a beautiful landscape."<sup>137</sup>

After leaving Providence, Pratt established his art studio permanently in Boston. He continued to produce portraits and landscapes throughout the rest of his career and was a founding member of the Boston Artists' Association, a professional group devoted to training and supporting the professional interests of artists in the city. As his career progressed, Pratt exhibited his works mostly in this professional capacity, with one notable exception. In 1849, the lure of the "moving panorama craze" was too strong and Pratt returned to public amusement exhibition once more

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<sup>136</sup> Ethan Allen Greenwood, proprietor of the New-England Museum in Boston and the Providence Museum, recorded daily receipts in his New-England Museum account book. They consistently show a large jump in visitation for Commencement Day at Harvard University. For example, in 1819, Commencement Day accrued nearly \$100 additional dollars than the day before. In 1820, Commencement Day receipts amounted to fully half the proceeds for that entire week. New England Museum Folio, 1818-1824, Ethan Allen Greenwood Papers, [1801-1839], American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>137</sup> "Panorama of Providence," *Rhode-Island American*, August 27, 1824; "Exhibition," *Rhode-Island American*, August 31, 1824; *Rhode-Island American*, August 31, 1824.

with his moving panorama “of a walk in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.”<sup>138</sup>  
(figure 2.37)

Finally, artists recently emigrated to the United States, like English marine painter Robert Salmon (1775-ca. 1845), also utilized public panorama exhibitions to publicize their skills and services, and to convince their new customers that their artworks were objects worthy “of public patronage.”<sup>139</sup> Salmon, like the majority of marine painters active in early nineteenth-century America, began his career in Europe painting seascapes, ship portraits, and harbor views of the British coastline. He was active there from 1800 to 1828 in coastal towns like Liverpool and Greenock, Scotland.<sup>140</sup> A surviving catalog of his pictures, kept from his own notes, documents his productivity throughout his career. For example, while living in Liverpool from 1811 to 1822, Salmon painted about 250 pictures, a steady average pace of about twenty a year. By 1828 then he was a well-seasoned professional and departed for the United States undoubtedly in search of new sea vistas to paint and new customers in the booming marine community of Boston. In his catalog he commemorated the

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<sup>138</sup> For more on itinerant portraitists, see Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, 300-313.

<sup>139</sup> “Picture of Boston,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 30, 1829, cited in John Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon: Painter of Ship & Shore* (Salem, MA: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1971), 110.

<sup>140</sup> Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon*, 10-34; Daniel Finamore, *Ships and Shorelines: William Bradford and Nineteenth Century American Marine Painting* (Vero Beach, FL: Vero Beach Museum of Art, 2010), 9-12.

journey, writing “left Liverpool, 16 June 1828, 32 days to New York, left New York for Boston, 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 1828.”<sup>141</sup>

Upon arriving in Boston, Salmon made arrangements to set up his business and began strategizing ways to introduce himself to Boston society in dramatic fashion. He rented quarters for his painting studio at the lower end of the Marine River wharf, with a bay window that allowed him to look out over the harbor.<sup>142</sup> He accepted short-term work to ease the expenses of his arrival in Boston, producing sketches of Charleston naval yard to sell to a lithographer and painting a drop scene for the Boston Theater representing Market Row, for which he received ten pounds. For the bulk of late 1828 and 1829 however, Salmon was preoccupied making preparations for an introductory project unlike anything he had previously undertaken. When arriving in a new city, Salmon had previously painted pictures to sell on speculation, as he did in Liverpool in 1806, when he sold his “Battle of Trafalgar” for a little over eight pounds. His Boston project however, he did not record as a “speculation” but rather as a “scene for self.”<sup>143</sup> This was not a quick project intended to encourage a quick first sale. Rather, it was a personal effort intended for professional advancement. The four “for self” paintings were panorama views for popular exhibition.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Catalog of Robert Salmon’s Pictures, 1828 to 1840. From his own notes, now in the possession of Miss Darracott, 1881.* Rare Books & Manuscripts Department, BPL (hereafter *Catalog of Robert Salmon’s Pictures*, BPL).

<sup>142</sup> *Proceedings of the Bostonian Society at the Annual Meeting* (8 January 1895), 37-38, quoted in Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon*, 10-11.

<sup>143</sup> In his catalog Salmon misspells the word scene, writing instead “sean.” For clarity I have omitted the mistake above.

<sup>144</sup> *Catalog of Robert Salmon’s Pictures*, BPL.

The four large views formed a visual calling card for Salmon's artistic prowess. Each was eight feet, four inches tall and fifteen feet, three inches long, the breadth created by sewing five individual lengths of canvas a yard wide together vertically.<sup>145</sup> Three of the scenes, *View of Algiers* (figure 2.38), *The British Fleet Forming a Line off Algiers* (figure 2.39), and a "nite battle at Algiers and the Algerian fleet," the last painted in semitransparent colors to create a dioramic lighting effect when lit from behind, were an triptych group that represented the British and Dutch naval attack on the African city of Algiers in 1816, following the Algerians' violent actions against English citizens.<sup>146</sup> The fourth view, of *Boston from Pemberton Hill* (figure 2.40), narratively stood alone but matched the others in size and was exhibited both independent of and alongside the Algerian series. Salmon kept account of time invested in each of his projects and indicated that each panorama, with nearly 130 square feet of canvas to paint, took on average at least a month to complete, considerably longer than his smaller canvases but a much faster pace than some panorama advertisements claimed other artists labored in completing their pictures.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> That construction is most obvious in the *British fleet forming a line off Algiers* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

<sup>146</sup> For more information on the Barbary conflicts and early American diplomacy, see: James A. Field, Jr., *From Gibraltar to the Middle East: America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1991).

<sup>147</sup> *View of the British Fleet* took 30 days to complete, *View of Boston from Pemberton Hill* took 42 days, and *Nite [sic] Battle of Algiers and the Algerian fleet* took 36 days to paint. Depending on the subject matter and size of the painting, Salmon invested anywhere from a single day's work to no more than twelve. Claims that a panorama was the product of several years' work were common advertising ploys, especially with moving panoramas beginning in the mid-1840s.

The Algerian scenes were undoubtedly inspired by theater and independent moving panorama exhibitions held in Greenock and Liverpool when Salmon worked in those cities in the 1820s, but his productions were likely not verbatim copies. Rather, he selected scenes that best highlighted his artistic skill.<sup>148</sup> His three surviving panorama canvases are quite distinct from each other, exhibiting Salmon's versatility both as a draughtsman and a painter. His manipulation of color across the different skylines creates varied moods to suit the narrative of the individual compositions: the brilliance over the city of Algiers emphasizes the exoticism of the foreign port and gives way to the ominous muted blues and gray tones in the sky over the British fleet. The now lost Night Attack transparency was likely the darkest, allowing for the application of light to mimic the bombardment. The views also exemplify Salmon's mastery of perspective, the dense bustle of Boston leading the eye to the harbor, the foreshortening of the ships in the British fleet creating depth and visual drama as the fleet circled on the brink of attack. With the four paintings Salmon showed he could create romantic urban views, accurately render detailed ship portraits, and produce sensitive portrayals of the sea, either with the tranquil, almost mirrored reflective waters of Algiers, or the choppy, agitated waters surrounding the British fleet.

Before mounting his panorama pictures, Salmon organized a one-man exhibition of nearly one hundred of his easel paintings, the bulk of which crossed the Atlantic with him, along with a few additions painted in Boston. His collection of oil

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<sup>148</sup> The *Advertiser* in Greenock, Scotland on April 25, 1820 ran an advertisement for the local theater's "grand panorama of the bombardment of Algiers," and five years later, *The Liverpool Mercury* ran ads for a "splendid and moving spectacle" of "the bombardment of Algiers by the British fleet." Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon*, 36-37.

paintings, “entirely from his own pencil,” was exhibited to the public in the Rotunda above the new Market-House throughout October 1829, anchored by his “very correct and beautiful view of the city of Boston and its harbor, on a large scale.”<sup>149</sup> The event brought Salmon the initial burst of publicity he desired, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* writing that “the degree of skill, talent, and judgment made evident in [the pictures]” disposed them to “wish the artist much success in his undertaking.”<sup>150</sup> The majority of those easel pictures were offered for sale at auction in late July 1830, shortly after the close of Salmon’s panorama exhibition at Boston’s Washington Hall that summer.<sup>151</sup>

Salmon never ventured into the realm of popular amusements again following his Algiers exhibition, that venture having served its purpose. Through this carefully orchestrated progress of exhibitions, Salmon built interest in his work and laid the foundation for his reputation as a working artist in Boston for the next decade. Throughout the 1830s, Salmon confidently painted on speculation and sold his pictures for between ten and fifty dollars each at auction, earning a changeable but generally respectable living: in 1832, his fifty paintings realized over \$650, in 1836, he received an annual high of \$780. He also made important connections with noted Bostonians who commissioned specific views from him for higher prices. For example, John Perkins Cushing, a prominent wealthy member of Boston’s mercantile

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<sup>149</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 30, 1829, cited in Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon*, 110.

<sup>150</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 9, 1829, cited in Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon*, 110.

<sup>151</sup> “Bombardment and Burning of Algiers,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 25, 1830, cited in Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon*, 111.



elite, commissioned two paintings from Salmon in 1832, for which he paid \$150 each. Salmon treated those commissions with the same attention he had his panoramas, devoting forty-three and thirty-one days respectively to the projects. By the time he returned to Europe in 1842, Salmon was locally known in Boston as a marine painter never “excelled by any artist in this country,” a status he achieved in part through strategic use of a public exhibition platform.<sup>152</sup>

### **Conclusion**

For artists in the first half of the nineteenth century, the volatile nature of the young art market meant that individuals aspiring to support themselves by their palette faced a difficult path. Professional artistic training was not readily available and even for those who managed to receive a European art education, it did not guarantee the support or patronage of the fickle American public. Diversifying and broadening their artistic offerings provided artists willing to do so some semblance of financial stability, but the aspirations of those who desired to elevate their social status cast a shadow of inferiority over those decorative or portraiture jobs.

The “public paintings” path was an available opportunity but one that was negotiated distinctly depending on the ambitions of the artist. For those concerned with establishing a fine arts tradition in the United States and carving out a place for premiere artists among the nation’s elite, pedantic historical or religious paintings allowed them to speculate on the public market while still pursuing the elevated subjects that suited their career aspirations. For the larger body of “limners” or working artists in this period, the panoramic opportunity provided them with an

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<sup>152</sup> Wilmerding, *Robert Salmon*, 40-43; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 7, 1842.

additional way to achieve financial stability, diversify their careers, appeal to the public's sympathies, and ingratiate themselves with potential patrons. The panoramic exhibition did not demand elevated taste or extensive knowledge from the public in order for them to appreciate it, but rather appealed to their broader senses of wonder and curiosity. Admittedly, neither academic nor panoramic public exhibitions were a guaranteed success, and in fact both paths were paved with more failed attempts than financial successes. By investigating the careers of panoramic artist entrepreneurs we discover a perhaps less glamorous but nevertheless candid picture of the American art economy, where art was business and the public was a difficult customer to please.

### Chapter 3

#### “A RARE CHANCE TO MAKE A FORTUNE?”: THE FALSE PROMISE OF THE PANORAMA BUSINESS

*“Who has not often wished to see Jerusalem? What heart is there...that has not often longed to behold that place on this guilty globe, where the Infinite descended in so many terrible, so many tender manifestations, and held communion with the children of men! When it was announced that a man combining the taste and skill of an artist, with the science of an engineer, and the courage of an adventurer, had visited the holy city, and by his boldness and address had procured access to places which Moslem intolerance guards from the intrusion of every other Christian foot, and had brought away most exact delineations of places associated with the mysteries and hopes of our holy religion – it was not strange that thousands should eagerly desire to cast their eyes upon the exciting scenes.”<sup>153</sup>*

The anonymous author of an eleven paragraph essay in the February 8, 1839 issue of the *Christian Reflector*, a Baptist newspaper published in New York and New England, was rapturous about Frederick Catherwood’s *Panorama of Jerusalem*. It had opened for public viewing in his New York exhibition building in late July 1838 (figure. 3.1) The author reported returning often to linger on the scene: “Especially do I delight to do this when the crowd is absent, and I can without interruption indulge.” Surrounded by the giant canvas, he spotted and described all the small details that brought on “recollections” and “melancholy musings.” The panorama offered an experience simultaneously religious, educational, and aesthetic, and it was replete with

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<sup>153</sup> “Panorama of Jerusalem,” *Christian Reflector*, February 8, 1839.

contemporary significance too. The author closed the article crying “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! – how fallen from her glory, and yet how dear, even in her desolations!”<sup>154</sup>

In the Second Great Awakening world of antebellum America, this panorama subject struck a special chord with local audiences. Religious sentiment was then a defining characteristic of American society. Furthermore, concern and interest in Jerusalem ran high. It was one of the holiest sites within the Christian faith, but also, since at least the twelfth century, it had been a contested landscape between Christian and Muslim powers.<sup>155</sup> This all helped to make the Catherwood panorama a popular attraction. The article alludes to the “thousands” who had eagerly “cast their eyes upon the exciting scene.” Contemporary news accounts also claimed that by October 1840, in just over two years on display in New York, “over two hundred thousand persons” had visited the panorama of Jerusalem, and perhaps also Catherwood’s panoramas of Niagara or Thebes, exhibited alongside Jerusalem at different times.<sup>156</sup>

Panoramas like Catherwood’s Jerusalem were triumphs of both entertainment and art, but whether panorama speculations were also lucrative ventures for the proprietors who brought them before American audiences is an open question. The exhibition of spectacular panorama canvases within America’s urban centers (which by the second half of the nineteenth century had spread to the far reaches of the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Christine Heyrman, *American Apostles: When Evangelicals Entered the World of Islam* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015); John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>156</sup> “City News. Catherwood’s Panoramas,” *North American and Daily Advertiser* (PA), October 24, 1840.

frontier) has long been a subject of scholarly investigation, but the practicalities of their production and display within the antebellum marketplace of entertainment have been little examined. Few examples survive, leaving flattering souvenir pamphlets and advertising materials as the panorama's most compelling documentary evidence. Through advertising, showmen hoped to promote future patronage of their exhibitions by painting a rosy picture of their success. They printed complementary reviews and endorsements, and frequently claimed that large numbers of citizens had already frequented their attractions. In a country where in 1850, New York City, the largest urban city in the United States, had a population of just over 500,000, the spectator numbers were staggering: reportedly, 70,000 attended Johnson's *Panorama of the Drunkard*, 230,000 went to see Hannington's celebrated moving dioramas, and over 2 million sought out Banvard's moving panorama of the Mississippi River over the course of its exhibition in America and Europe. At 10 to 50 cents a ticket (depending on the exhibitor), it *appears* that panoramic displays were not only wildly popular, they were also indisputably profitable.

However, taking these promotional materials at face value provides little insight into the working nature of panoramas as operating businesses, nor does it push existing scholarship beyond its consideration of panoramas as revered (or reviled) nineteenth-century cultural attractions and works of art. Throughout the nineteenth century, these enterprises were touted as easy money makers and consistently attracted the interest of artists and showmen alike. However, to build a prosperous entertainment business upon panorama display was actually quite difficult. A panoramacist benefited from artistic skill, but talent was probably less important than

the business savvy necessary to navigate an economy frequently disrupted by instability and crisis. That combination in panoramic exhibitors was rare.

By examining rare surviving business records which document income alongside the expenses involved in operating panorama businesses, this chapter shows that even the most “successful” panoramas could be financially burdensome and ultimately unsustainable ventures. Although numerous examples are here drawn together, this chapter focuses primarily on the example of Frederick Catherwood and George W. Jackson’s New York City Panorama Rotunda, which opened its doors to the public from June 1838 to July 1842. Assumptions about Catherwood’s panorama success have permeated scholarship since the mid twentieth century, when his biographer, Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, touted the “commendable profit” reaped by his exhibition.<sup>157</sup> Von Hagen came to this conclusion after a fleeting examination of a surviving account book, which documents the day-to-day economic activity at the Rotunda from November 1, 1838 to October 31, 1841. (figure 3.2)

These records, when examined under proper scrutiny, reveal that even Catherwood and Jackson’s success (evidenced in the press with reports of over 200,000 visitors by October 1840) was crippled by heavy initial investments, ever-mounting monthly expenses, and the progressive slowing of their income as public

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<sup>157</sup> Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood, Archt.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 82. Von Hagen’s statements about the Panorama’s financial success and “commendable profit from the constant flow of visitors into the Rotunda” has been repeated by subsequent scholars studying Catherwood. See for example, R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820-1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 53; Peter O. Koch, *John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood: Pioneers of Mayan Archaeology* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 82.

interest waned over the years. These factors may very well have made the burning of their Rotunda, late Friday night on July 29, 1842 a blessing in disguise.<sup>158</sup> Although panoramas then and now are primarily seen as works of art of variable quality, they were in fact entertainment speculations produced and operated without the institutional support of art academies, collectors or patrons. Their proprietors faced both artistic and entrepreneurial struggles, and their efforts were hampered at every step by the very nature of their attractions and the economic climate of the first half of the nineteenth century, dooming many an exhibitor to failure.

### **Guaranteed Success?**

Beginning with the first panorama exhibitions in America in 1794, public opinion regarding the attractions was split. Some spectators reacted positively, expressing shock and awe after standing face to face with the enormous paintings. In Philadelphia, Elizabeth Drinker's son William reported that Edward Savage's *Panorama of London and Westminster* was "very beautiful, and well worth going to view."<sup>159</sup> Writing from New York City, Charles Willson Peale's brother-in-law John DePeyster was more effusive with his praise, describing William Winstanley's exhibition in that city as surpassing "every thing of the kind I ever saw...it is the most

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<sup>158</sup> "Cities of Canvas Destroyed," *North American and Daily Advertiser* (PA), August 1, 1842. One hopes that Catherwood was able to look at the loss of his business with the same humor that can be found in some period newspapers. For example, this joke was published in the immediate aftermath of the fire. "Conundrum. – Why is Mr. Catherwood, since the burning of his Panoramas, like an orphan child? Because he has no *Pa-nor-a-ma*." *Brooklyn Evening Star* (NY), September 27, 1842.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth Drinker [diary], 30 September 1795, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, vol. I, Elaine Forman Crane, ed. (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 723-736.

Naturall (sic) & best [painting] I ever saw.”<sup>160</sup> In contrast, some panorama visitors were less easily impressed. During a trip to London, John Quincy Adams visited the original Leicester Square panorama. Already familiar with Savage’s American version, he called the panorama “a species of exhibition remarkable only from its first impression.”<sup>161</sup> Salem, Massachusetts’ William Bentley wrote in February 1795: “at Boston I saw the Panorama, a catch penny show, but not without its merits in our infant Country. It encourages better attempts.”<sup>162</sup> Whether with reverence or revulsion, the American public had taken notice of the panorama.

Critics within the American art community regarded panorama exhibitions as a “humble, though more profitable” art.<sup>163</sup> Although inferior to more elevated artistic pursuits like history painting, in their opinion the panorama’s spectacular nature also made it easy to understand and therefore suitable for the broader public. “In truth, of all exhibitions in the line of painting, that of Panorama, is the most universally attractive, owing to the extent of scenery, and the degree of illusion produced; it

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<sup>160</sup> John DePeyster to Charles Willson Peale, 6 May 1795, *Peale Family Papers*, vol. I, Lillian Miller, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 113-114.

<sup>161</sup> John Quincy Adams to Abigail Adams, 6 January 1796, *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 29, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-11-02-0060>. Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 11, *July 1795–February 1797*, ed. Margaret A. Hogan, C. James Taylor, Sara Martin, Neal E. Millikan, Hobson Woodward, Sara B. Sikes, and Gregg L. Lint. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 125–128.

<sup>162</sup> *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts*, vol. II (Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1905-1914), 126.

<sup>163</sup> “Panoramas,” *National Advocate* (NY), April 21, 1818.



requires no particularly cultivated taste, or initiation in the art, to be struck with the magic effect of a Panorama picture.”<sup>164</sup> As discussed in chapter one, panoramic speculations were an option available to struggling artists whose potential American patrons were eager to commission only portraits, or even worse, decorative painting work for buildings, furniture, or vehicles. While panoramic work was perhaps not academically rewarding, critics hoped it would be a stepping stone “to promote a taste for the fine arts” in the young United States, where a “taste for the arts must be graduated according to the scale of intellect and education.”<sup>165</sup>

Indeed, chatter around panorama displays promised that, if managed properly, they would undoubtedly yield a valuable financial reward. For example, New York’s *National Advocate* newspaper, reporting on preparations being made in the city for John Vanderlyn’s panorama rotunda (figure 3.3), offered unsolicited advice about desirable subjects for his paintings. “We should suggest to Mr. Vanderlyn now, for fear we should forget it, that panorama views of our battles, such as Chippewa, Erie, New Orleans, Lake Champlain &c. with the likenesses of officers engaged on these occasions, would not only be highly national and popular, but exceedingly profitable.”<sup>166</sup>

The promise of easy profit permeated advertisements for the sale of panoramas others were abandoning. Two notices, one published in December 1810 in the Boston

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<sup>164</sup> “Communications – Panorama Painting,” *The Southern Patriot* (Charleston, SC), March 5, 1835.

<sup>165</sup> *The National Advocate*, April 21, 1818.

<sup>166</sup> “Panoramas,” *National Advocate*, April 21, 1818.

*Repertory* and an Auction Sale ad in the *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* in September 1830, described the “rare chance!” they were offering. “To the enterprising – an opportunity is now offered to realize a handsome fortune.” Purchasing and exhibiting a panorama could be counted on to “produce a desirable revenue in either Europe or America.”<sup>167</sup> After all, the “encomiums and warm approbation bestowed upon [panoramas] by every visitor must be the harbinger of its success.”<sup>168</sup> The Baltimore ad did hedge on its promises, however. In attempting to sell their panoramas of “the Falls of Niagara and the Bay and City of Quebec,” along with the Rotunda building within which they had been exhibited in Baltimore, the unnamed proprietors prefaced their promises of future fortune with the phrase “if managed by a suitable person,” suggesting that failure would be wholly the result of the new proprietor’s incompetence.<sup>169</sup>

Despite these assumptions of success however, the experiences of panorama exhibitors show that these attractions rarely lived up to their promise. A series of letters written by New York museum proprietor Gardiner Baker following his foray into panorama exhibition show that the behind-the-scenes side of the panorama exhibition, from the required investments in exhibition spaces and labor to upkeep, made them disaster prone. Baker, who had operated New York City’s first public museum, the American Museum, since 1791, had decided by 1797 to diversify his

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<sup>167</sup> “Auction Sale. Two Panoramas & a Rotundo [sic],” *Baltimore Patriot*, September 3, 1830.

<sup>168</sup> “Rare Chance!,” *Boston Repertory*, December 14, 1810.

<sup>169</sup> “Auction Sale. Two Panoramas & a Rotundo [sic],” *Baltimore Patriot*, September 3, 1830.

offerings to the public by purchasing and exhibiting two panoramas. He started with William Winstanley's *Panorama of Charleston*, and later exhibited Savage's original *Panorama of London and Westminster*. (figure 2.5) Baker exhibited both in a building that Winstanley had already partially prepared for panorama exhibition at No. 222 Greenwich Street. This leased building added another venue and attraction for his museum visitors to patronize. A letter Baker wrote to a friend on February 11, 1797 tells of the heavy financial investment required for opening his panorama. Writing just days after it had opened to the public, Baker was optimistic. "...I have had some visitors and if the great pleasure that they expressed may be the criterion to judge by, I shall be well rewarded when it gets generally known. My expenses hence is upwards of 3000 doll[ar]s."<sup>170</sup> Those unspecified initial expenses likely included purchasing the painting, securing use of the Greenwich Street building and paying for any alterations it required, and the all-important advertising expenses.

A second letter by Baker, written just over a year later, reveals the panorama's failure to produce enough to repay his investment. Instead, it had become an additional financial burden on top of his other missteps as a museum proprietor. Baker reported that he was "indebted about 2000 dollars...unless I make some extraordinary exertion I may not expect for a considerable length of time to be freed from debt."<sup>171</sup> His foray into panorama exhibition lasted less time than the gap between his letters, only eleven months from February to December 1797, but long enough to leave him with a sizable

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<sup>170</sup> Gardiner Baker to John Pintard, 11 February 1797, John Pintard Papers, [1779-1880], New York Historical Society (hereafter NYHS).

<sup>171</sup> Gardiner Baker to John Pintard, 4 March 1798, John Pintard Papers, [1779-1880], NYHS.

debt that would burden his wife when Baker died of yellow fever in the fall of 1798. What he had hoped would revitalize his museum enterprise had instead led to ruination.

While Baker's panorama misfortunes were among the earliest in America, they were not the last. In 1818, a Daniel T. Steel, then proprietor of the supposedly English *Grand Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo*, began a sweeping tour of the United States.<sup>172</sup> Over the course of a year, he displayed his painting in Boston, Providence, New York, Baltimore, and finally Philadelphia, never staying longer than a few months in each new town and accruing debts along the way.<sup>173</sup> His luck ran out in Philadelphia, where he was likely arrested and on December 30, 1819, forced to appear at the county courthouse to face his creditors.<sup>174</sup> John Collins, the Irish-born proprietor of the *Panorama of the City of Paris*, found himself in a similar situation a year later. According to his own statement, which he published in the *Baltimore Patriot*, Collins had "met with many disappointments in this city, partly in

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<sup>172</sup> Although Steel's advertisements claimed his panorama was painted by Henry Aston Barker for the London Leicester Square Panorama, others disputed that claim by pointing out that Mr. Barker's *Battle of Waterloo* "is yet in England – the exhibition of which has realized so handsome a sum, that he has declared he will never remove it." See: "Panorama of the City of Paris," *Baltimore Patriot*, December 31, 1819.

<sup>173</sup> "Grand Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo, never before exhibited in the U. States," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 17, 1818; "Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo," *Providence Gazette*, July 18, 1818; "Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo," *New York Mercantile Advertiser*, August 27, 1818; "Communication," *Baltimore Patriot*, February 26, 1819; "Communication," *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), May 11, 1819.

<sup>174</sup> "Take Notice," *Philadelphia Franklin Gazette*, December 14, 1819.

consequence of the pressure of the times, but more particularly by the machinations of acute enemies, professedly friends.” As a result, he found himself in need of “employment for a short time to enable him to pay expenses,” and advertised his services as a bookkeeper.<sup>175</sup> These struggles ended the panorama careers of Steel and Collins but their exhibitions lived on under new proprietors, who were apparently unfazed by their failures.

For artists and showmen eager to make money, numerous examples of panorama failures could not dampen the hope that arose from stories of rare panorama successes. John Vanderlyn, whose efforts to establish a permanent Panorama venue in New York were marred by debt, disappointment, and ultimately the loss of his Rotunda building, was lured back into the trade again and again by rumors. In the 1830s, he followed the American tour of British showmen and naturalist William Bullock’s *Panorama of the Superb City of Mexico* jealously. The circular panorama, painted by Robert Burford in London based upon Bullock’s original sketches during his tour throughout Mexico in the early 1820s, arrived in the United States in 1828.<sup>176</sup> Its first American venue was in fact Vanderlyn’s New York Rotunda, for which he received a cut of the proceeds. Following this brief connection with Vanderlyn, the panorama continued touring independently another seven years, supposedly with great financial success. When Vanderlyn received word that Bullock’s panorama had made \$1000 in its first fourteen days in Savannah, Georgia in early 1831, he immediately

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<sup>175</sup> “A Card,” *Baltimore Patriot*, June 8, 1820.

<sup>176</sup> For more on William Bullock’s showman career, see: Altick, *Shows of London*, 235-252; Michael P. Costeloe, “El Panorama de Mexico de Bullock/Burford,” *Historia Mexicana* 59, no. 4 (Abril-Junio 2010): 1216-1220.

dispatched his nephew to take their panoramas there.<sup>177</sup> He did the same two years later in Philadelphia, chasing success but never quite realizing it himself.

Nevertheless, he, like other aspiring artists and showmen, continued to believe there was money to be made in the panorama trade.

### **Catherwood and Jackson's Panoramic Speculation, 1838-1842**

The most complete business records for a panoramic enterprise located to date speak to this outward appearance of success and the hidden challenges inherent in operating this kind of business. At the end of June 1838, a panorama building opened in New York City, at the corner of Prince and Mercer Streets, just across from the fashionable entertainment hotspot Niblo's Garden. (figures 3.4 and 3.5) It was run by English architect and artist Frederick Catherwood and George W. Jackson, who was likely Catherwood's American business agent or perhaps his business partner. From its opening on June 21 to the tragic destruction of the building by fire on July 29, 1842, they exhibited panoramas from nine in the morning to half past nine in the evening (or until dusk, depending on the time of the year).

Over four years, they exhibited six different imported panoramas all produced in the London studio of Robert Burford, successor to the Leicester Square Panorama enterprise begun by Robert Barker and his son, Henry Aston.<sup>178</sup> Catherwood and

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<sup>177</sup> John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 13 February 1831; John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 26 June, 1833, Vanderlyn papers, AAA.

<sup>178</sup> For more on Robert Burford's London panorama business, see: Altick, *Shows of London*, 137-140; Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, 113-144. The 1833-1834 diary of Henry Courtney Selous held by the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, documents his time working with Burford at his Leicester Square Panorama.

Jackson opened with the ever-popular Jerusalem and Niagara Falls, then replaced those with panoramas of Thebes and Lima in April 1839. Finally, a year later, they arranged for the exhibition of panoramas of Rome and the Bay of Islands of New Zealand. Thanks to the surviving single-entry account book kept either by Jackson or a member of the Panorama staff, a day-to-day picture of its operation survives for all but nine months.<sup>179</sup> Recording daily ticket sales along with all weekly and monthly expenses, this revealing picture of the Catherwood Panorama exposes the hard truths concealed behind the public veneer touting panorama exhibition successes.

The genesis of this new permanent panorama establishment in New York City lay undoubtedly with Frederick Catherwood, whose adventurous nature and artistic talent had brought him into contact with that line of work before his arrival in America. Born February 27, 1799 in England to an affluent family, Catherwood was well educated, having completed a five-year apprenticeship as an architect at 21, and studied art at the Royal Academy in London. An avid enthusiast of the ancient world and its art and architecture, Catherwood traveled to and explored Italy and Greece throughout the 1820s and early 1830s. He then spent six years in Egypt, Sinai, and Arabia Petraea, arriving in the city of Jerusalem in 1833. He sketched diligently and profusely throughout his travels, recording sites then unknown to Europeans. In Jerusalem, Catherwood was reportedly the first “infidel” or nonbeliever to enter the

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<sup>179</sup> The day-to-day entries go from November 1, 1838 to October 31, 1841, so technically the first five months and last nine months are missing from the account book. However, the income and expenses for the first five months the Panorama was open are summarized in the first few pages of the day book, providing a decent picture of that gap.

Mosque of Omar, in order to sketch the interior of the Dome of the Rock and the adjoining Mosque of al-Aqsa. (figure 3.6)

Having spent years exploring the ancient world, Catherwood returned to London in 1835. Although he had hoped to find a publisher for his drawings, he was unsuccessful in securing support for that project. He did however find a venue for his landscape views with Robert Burford, who in the 1830s was running the Panorama business in London's Leicester Square. Catherwood may have been hired originally to work as a landscape painter, but Burford quickly proposed the idea of using Catherwood's drawings as the basis for new panoramas. Three were eventually produced: *A View of the City of Jerusalem*, *A View of the Great Temple of Karnak and the Surrounding City of Thebes*, and *A View of the Ruins of the Temple of Baalbek*. It was during the London exhibition of *A View of the City of Jerusalem* that Catherwood met kindred spirit John Lloyd Stephens, an American explorer who, like Catherwood, had spent the opening decades of the nineteenth century exploring the world. It was from Stephens that Catherwood learned that America was the place to seek success. In June 1836, Catherwood arrived in New York in search of new opportunities.

Catherwood first pursued work as an architect and opened a practice at No. 4 Wall-Street. He later began a partnership with Frederick Diaper, a fellow English architect. (figure 3.7) However, from the moment Catherwood stepped off the *Barque Union* with his young pregnant bride Gertrude and their infant son Frederick, he was already developing a decidedly different business venture to pursue: panorama exhibitor. Despite earlier assumptions by some historians that Catherwood had returned to England before 1838 to retrieve *Jerusalem* for exhibition in his New York



building, passenger lists do not show him sailing for London again until 1839, when he returned to negotiate the purchase of Burford's panoramas of Thebes and Lima, Peru.<sup>180</sup> This indicates that on that initial journey, Catherwood likely already had in his possession not only the *Panorama of Jerusalem* based upon his own drawings, but also Burford's *Panorama of Niagara*, based upon Burford's drawings and completed in the autumn of 1832.<sup>181</sup>

Accounts indicate that New York investors initially were not enthusiastic about the possibility of another permanent exhibition space for colossal paintings. Perhaps they were still recovering from their experience with Vanderlyn's panorama, which had ended with the repossession of his building by the city in 1835. A letter to Catherwood dated October 1836 from his friend, John Davies, records the lack of interest Catherwood had found in the New York scene for this kind of speculation. Davies had heard

most discouraging reports which were in circulation about the complete failure of your panorama. I was very glad to have all doubts set at rest by your own manual. . . I cannot say that I am astonished at the apathy of the N. Yorkers toward your spec.[ulation] . . . they patronize nothing that does not appeal to the passions – actors, singers and mountebanks of all

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<sup>180</sup> New York, Passenger and Immigration Lists, 1820-1850, Ancestry.com.

<sup>181</sup> The 1837 books of description for Catherwood's panorama building on Charles Street in Boston confirm the exhibition of both panoramas prior to the completion of the New York Building, as do Boston-area advertisements for this earlier exhibition. *Description of a view of the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding country; now exhibiting at the Panorama, Charles Street* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1837); *Description of a View of the Falls of Niagara, now exhibiting at the Panorama, Charles Street* (Boston: Printed by Perkins and Marvin, 1837). The American Antiquarian Society holds copies of both of these Boston-printed pamphlets.

sorts are perfectly deified among them but a beautiful picture is at a 'tarnation discount.'<sup>182</sup>

Although he had only been in New York for five months, that seemed to have been enough time for Catherwood to mention his disappointment to a confidant and for that news to spread quickly. As the letter indicates however, he seems not to have been deterred in his hopes. With resistance and a lack of interest in New York, Catherwood turned to promoting the enterprise himself, but not in that city. Instead, he moved on to New England, specifically the area around Boston, one of the young United States' growing centers of art and culture.

In going North, Catherwood made the decision to embark on a lecture tour and publicity campaign to stir interest in his endeavors. In the same letter, Davies complemented Catherwood's marketing plans. "I admire your idea of giving lectures... I think they might be made a very preparatory stuff before opening the panorama."<sup>183</sup> With that choice, Catherwood, and later his business associate George W. Jackson, made strategic decisions that promoted the visibility, respectability, and profitability of their Panorama. However, in the growing and cut-throat capitalist economy of antebellum urban America, their speculation was a risk, one which even the profits from 75,000 paying visitors would not compensate them.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> As quoted in Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood: Archt.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 45. Von Hagen does not cite where this material came from, but it is listed in the collections of the New York Historical Society. John Davies to Frederick Catherwood, 10 October 1836, Mss Collection, NYHS.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> That visitation count comes from tabulation of ticket sales for the individual panoramas and season ticket sales. Individual panorama ticket sales documented in the account book equal \$18,098.78. At 25 cents a ticket, that comes to about 72,396

The rest of this chapter scrutinizes the solvency of the Catherwood/Jackson panorama business and contextualizes their decisions within the economic system of antebellum America by analyzing the totaled results of the income and expenses recorded in their account book. (table 1) The analysis shows that despite the large numbers of people visiting the panorama, according to the numbers in their account book documenting the period from July 1838 to October 1841, the business slowly accrued more debts than income could support.

### **Stirring Interest**

With confidence in his firsthand knowledge and the quality of the illustrations that accompanied his lectures, Catherwood began his lecture tour at Clinton Hall in New York, “to an appreciating but not large audience,” in November 1836. With little fanfare, Catherwood took “the good people” of the city by surprise with his skill and talent, unknown to them “for the want of sufficient heralding and previous announcement.” He began by discussing his travels through Egypt, the first of a three-lecture series that also included evenings on Palestine and Jerusalem. The first audience of a few people “of taste and judgment to whom his name was familiar” was startled by the knowledge and expertise about these ancient cities Catherwood had gained through his travels and also by his rich, impressive, and “clear language.” The

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visitors, plus 904 individuals who paid the \$1 for season tickets. This totals 73,300 visitors at a minimum (not taking into account potential discounts for groups or promotional days that would have attracted more people). For example, at the very end of the panorama of Jerusalem’s exhibition in Boston in December 1837, the panorama was open “for the free admission of spectators this day and Monday next.” Frederick Catherwood Account Book, Nov. 1838 to Oct. 1841, NYHS (hereafter Catherwood Account Book); “Panorama of Jerusalem,” *Boston Post*, December 2, 1837.

impression he made was so great that a reporter for the *New-York Herald* predicted the success of Catherwood's future speaking engagements, stating that "light such as that cannot be long hidden under a buschel (sic)." <sup>185</sup>

And he did go on to several more engagements. Over the course of the next year, Catherwood carved a path to Boston, travelled back to New York, and then doubled back to New England once more, lecturing on the way in New Haven, Hartford, Boston, Salem, New Bedford, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. <sup>186</sup> As word of his lectures spread, he began speaking before larger crowds, and news of his first Boston lecture series was published in newspapers across the country. <sup>187</sup>

With his lecture tour, Catherwood became one of several people publically lecturing on Jerusalem and the ancient world in the late 1830s, joining individuals like Joseph Wentworth Ingraham, and Englishman James Silk Buckingham. Ingraham, a native of Boston, a printer and advocate of Sunday School education, in 1828 had published a "correct map of Palestine, together with a book upon the subject, explanatory and historical," and subsequently used that publication as the basis of his

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<sup>185</sup> "Mr. Catherwood's Lectures," *New York Spectator*, November 11, 1836.

<sup>186</sup> "Mr. Catherwood's Lectures," *Connecticut Herald*, December 13, 1836; "Lectures of Mr. Catherwood on Palestine and Egypt," *Connecticut Courant*, December 24, 1836; "Lectures on Jerusalem Egypt and Palestine," *Boston Post*, January 4, 1837; "Lectures," *New-Bedford Mercury*, March 31, 1837; "Lectures on Jerusalem, Egypt, and Palestine," *Salem Gazette* (MA), May 5, 1837; "Lectures on Egypt, Palestine & Jerusalem," *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics* (NH), September. 2, 1837.

<sup>187</sup> "From the Boston Mercantile Journal. Egypt. Mr. Catherwood's Lectures," *West Columbia Telegraph and Texas Register*, March 14, 1837.

own lectures.<sup>188</sup> He, however, had never visited the Holy Land. When confronted with Catherwood's first hand experience and travels through that region, reportedly Ingraham said that he "hardly felt worthy to open my lips in the presence of one who has himself visited the scenes of which I speak only by report; who has himself literally stood on the walls of Zion, and who describes scenes and events, 'all which he saw, and part of which he was.'"<sup>189</sup>

It was Buckingham, an English journalist and one-time member of the English Parliament, who was Catherwood's stiffest competition on the lecture circuit.<sup>190</sup> Like Catherwood, Buckingham had traveled extensively throughout the world, and his observations were known through his series of popular travel guides and histories published beginning in the 1820s.<sup>191</sup> At least one American observer, Samuel

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<sup>188</sup> John Woart, "An address delivered in Christ Church: at the funeral of Joseph W. Ingraham together with proceedings of the primary school committee, in relation to his death," (Boston: J.H. Eastburn—City Printer, 1848), 9-13. AAS; Joseph Wentworth Ingraham, *An Historical Map of Palestine, or the Holy Land* (Boston: Thomas B. Wait and Joseph W. Ingraham, 1828).

<sup>189</sup> *Salem Gazette* (MA), January 1, 1837.

<sup>190</sup> James Hildreth, ed., *Notes of the Buckingham lectures: embracing sketches of the geography, antiquities, and present condition of Egypt and Palestine:/ compiled from the oral discourses of the Hon. J.S. Buckingham. Together with a sketch of his life.* (New York: Published by Leavitt, Lord, & Co., 1838).

<sup>191</sup> James Silk Buckingham, *Travels in Palestine* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822); *Travels among the Arab tribes inhabiting the countries east of Syria and Palestine* (London: Printed for Longham, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825). After moving with his family to the United States in the late 1830s, Buckingham went on to write several books about North America as well. See for example, *America, historical, statistic, and descriptive* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1841); *The Slave States of America* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842); *Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the other British provinces in North America: with a plan of national colonization* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1843).

Rodman, seemed to have preferred Buckingham's lecture over Catherwood's. In his diary, Rodman recorded attending lectures by both men when they traveled through New Bedford, Massachusetts, Catherwood on April 6, 1837, and Buckingham on December 10, 1838. Buckingham's lecture on Egypt was so well attended that it filled the Unitarian Meeting House to capacity and inspired Rodman's imagination and pen.

I was much interested and instructed in the geographical, historical, and statistic statements which [Buckingham] made respecting that wonderful country, the cradle of civilization and the arts from whence the most ancient and renowned nations of antiquity borrowed their learning and kindled the flame which carried them on to power and greatness, a county unique in many striking particulars and presenting through all its early history as it does not under its present efficient and able Pasha, a strong contrast to the adjacent as well as the remote parts of the immense continent of which in point of territory it forms so insignificant a portion.<sup>192</sup>

Even with this competition, Catherwood attracted attention, aided by his showmanship and the rumors that circulated in American society about his romantic liaisons during his travels. Catherwood added a bit of flare and spectacle to the lecture hall by attending some of his engagements in "splendid TURKISH dress."<sup>193</sup> It was his wife however, that fascinated some members of the public. In 1834, while traveling through Syria, Catherwood met Gertrude Abbott, the daughter of Peter Abbott, then the British Consul in Beirut, Lebanon, and his Spanish wife.<sup>194</sup> That year,

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<sup>192</sup> Zephaniah W. Pease, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Rodman: A New Bedford Chronicle of Thirty-Seven Years, 1821-1859* (New Bedford, MA: Reynolds Printing Co., 1927), 173, 186.

<sup>193</sup> "Lectures on Jerusalem Egypt and Palestine," *Boston Post*, January 4, 1837.

<sup>194</sup> "Crim[in]al Con[tention] – Catherwood v. Caslon," *The Observer* (London, England), December 12, 1841; Ruth Kark, *American Consuls in the Holy Land, 1832-*

they were married by the American evangelical missionary, the Reverend Isaac Bird, and continued travelling through the region before settling in England and, in 1836, moving to America. By then, Gertrude's parentage had been transformed into a scandalous misrepresentation that nevertheless, seemed to add to Catherwood's mystique. After hearing Catherwood lecture in Philadelphia on January 25, 1838, Delaware-native Phoebe George Bradford wrote that she "was charmed and instructed. E. Gilpin there also. She said Mr. Catherwood, the speaker, was a native of London, [and] married an African by birth, daughter of a consul."<sup>195</sup> These rumors and social judgments may have contributed to the marital strife that plagued the Catherwoods in subsequent years and led to the dissolution of their marriage in the 1840s, but they did help make him a household name.<sup>196</sup>

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1914 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 85. Peter Abbott died in 1834 and was buried in the Anglo-American Cemetery in Beirut, Lebanon.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/160317789>

<sup>195</sup> Wilson, W. Emerson, ed. *Diaries of Phoebe George Bradford, 1832-1839* (Wilmington, DE: Historical Society of Delaware, 1975), 267.

<sup>196</sup> Gertrude Catherwood (whose full name may have been Maria de Africa Gertrudis Pasquala Catherwood) returned to England with the couple's children in September 1839, when her husband joined John Lloyd Stephens on his expedition to explore South America. According to a civil suite brought before the Court of Exchequer by Frederick Catherwood in December 1840, upon arriving in England, Gertrude began an affair with Henry William Caslon (1814-1874), a second cousin of Frederick Catherwood's, and lived "in open adultery" with him. Although Caslon's lawyer attempted to prove that the Catherwoods were not legally married and therefore no crime had been committed, the court ruled in Catherwood's favor and awarded him £200. Catherwood took possession of the couple's children after this scandal, and Gertrude remained with Caslon. Their marriage is recorded in the England & Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index, in 1853. It is in these records that her full, non-anglicized name, appears. "Catherwood v. Caslon," in *Reports of Cases argued and ruled at Nisi Prius, in the Courts of Queen's Bench, Common Pleas, & Exchequer*, F.A. Carrington, and J.R. Marshman, eds. (London: Printed for S. Sweet, 1843), 431;

## The Burden of Initial Capital Investments

### Exhibition Spaces

As was likely his intention, Catherwood's tour spread the knowledge that "he has in New-York a grand panorama of Jerusalem, covering about 10,000 square feet of canvass [sic], which waits only for the erection of a suitable building in which it may be displayed."<sup>197</sup> In New England, he decided he had enough momentum and interest to begin exhibiting his paintings. Catherwood built the first of a series of exhibition buildings on Boston Common in June 1837, where he exhibited his panoramas of Jerusalem and Niagara for seven months, through December 1837. (figure 3.8) The account book reveals that building construction and the acquisition of the paintings to exhibit in them, made up the bulk of Catherwood's initial capital investment to get his business up and running.

As a trained architect, Catherwood likely had a hand in designing that building on Charles Street, a practical and financial experience he later applied to erecting his longer-lived New York panorama building. No images survive of the Boston building, but textual sources indicate it was a circular or "polygon" structure whose outer walls were wooden boards of a single thickness. Purportedly 75,000 feet of lumber were used throughout the building, and its roof incorporated 1400 feet of "super Glass," for the sky-lights that dominated the ceiling. The structure was held together by belts and

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*The Observer* (London, England), December 12, 1841; "Henry William Caslon," in the *England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915*. Ancestry.com.

<sup>197</sup> "Lectures of Mr. Catherwood on Palestine and Egypt," *Connecticut Courant*, December 24, 1836.



bands of the “best English refined Iron.”<sup>198</sup> The circular building had at least a twenty foot diameter, and the *Panorama of Jerusalem* was displayed along the whole of its interior surface. There was a flight of stairs in the middle that ascended about half way up the building to a secondary “circular scaffold or gallery” where visitors could sit or stand and view the smaller *Panorama of Niagara*.<sup>199</sup>

When Catherwood and his panoramas removed to New York, Bostonites were anxious to turn the temporary structure into a permanent landmark for other amusement or civic uses. News that the city’s Committee of the Board of Alderman planned to tear down the building caused a public outcry and led those who wished the building to remain to submit a petition signed by seventeen hundred citizens. The Committee had argued that the building was “unsafe in its character” and that it was in violation of Boston’s law on wooden buildings, points that the building’s supporters protested or used to point out the city’s hypocrisy. A letter to the editor published in the *Boston Courier* argued that while the building was indeed made of wood, it was not dangerous because it was “of so slight a character as to afford no materials for a dangerous conflagration. It could be thrown down, and the fire smothered, in a few minutes, before the fire could make any progress.”<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, the editorial argued that even if the building did violate Boston’s law on wooden buildings, the mayor and alderman had approved the building’s initial construction and also the construction of

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<sup>198</sup> “Removal of the Panorama, To the Editor of the Courier,” *Boston Courier*, November 30, 1837; “Building Materials,” *Boston Courier*, December 7, 1837.

<sup>199</sup> “The Panorama,” *Parley’s Magazine* VI, (Boston: J.H. Francis, 1838), 95-97.

<sup>200</sup> “Removal of the Panorama, To the Editor of the Courier,” *Boston Courier*, November 30, 1837.

the National Theater and of a large wooden building on Washington Street, both larger than Catherwood's building and therefore also in violation of the law. The Panorama building, over one hundred and sixty feet away from the nearest house, did not pose a serious danger to the surrounding neighborhood. In order to secure and further beautify the structure and surrounding area, Catherwood had even offered "to cover the building, if required, with plaster."<sup>201</sup>

The petitioners were not successful, and "just before the beginning of winter [the building] was taken down again and the boards and timber sold for other purposes."<sup>202</sup> Even if the local community was disappointed, Catherwood at least recouped some of his Boston expenses through the sale. Unfortunately, records do not survive that enumerate the capital needed for the Boston building. They do survive however for the New York panorama building, located on the corner of Prince and Mercer streets, one block west of Broadway. That information makes it possible to reconstruct the time and money required to finish building a venue, which Catherwood did at least four times. In Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, Catherwood commissioned purpose-built structures, and he seems to have adapted a large building in New Bedford, Massachusetts for a short run exhibition of his *Panorama of the Bay of Islands* in New Zealand.

This larger network of panorama buildings is referenced only occasionally in the New York City account book. Only eleven entries document the preparations made

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> "The Panorama," *Parley's Magazine*, 1838; "Building Materials," *Boston Courier*, December 7, 1837.

for the Philadelphia panorama building.<sup>203</sup> They include several references to new construction, including the purchase and transportation of “ground glass for sky lights” from New York to Philadelphia. Unlike the wooden structure in Boston, the Philadelphia “Coliseum” was a “large but plain brick building...circular, being ninety feet in diameter and sixty in height, to the lantern.”<sup>204</sup> In contrast, only three entries in the account book mention the “New Bedford panorama,” and correspond with advertisements in the *New Bedford Morning Register* that indicate that Catherwood’s *Panorama of the Bay of Islands* was exhibited in that city only from late July to late October 1841 “at the large building corner of County and Elm sts (sic).”<sup>205</sup> Adapting an existing building would have kept expenses low in New Bedford and allowed Catherwood to cut the exhibition short with minimal losses. His efforts in New York would not be so short lived, or cheap.

Completing the Panorama in New York took over three months, the combined efforts of nearly thirty local craftsmen and laborers, and nearly \$8000.<sup>206</sup> (Table 1,

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<sup>203</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 112-182.

<sup>204</sup> “Panoramas of Jerusalem and Thebes,” *North American and Daily Advertiser* (PA), September 29, 1840.

<sup>205</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 204-205. “Catherwood’s Panorama of the Bay of Islands-in New Zealand,” *New Bedford Morning Register* (MA), July 27, 1841; “Positively the Last Week of Catherwood’s Panorama of the Bay of Islands,” *New Bedford Morning Register* (MA), October 26, 1841.

<sup>206</sup> The building could have cost more than \$8000; it is difficult to tell from the building expense records that survive because of annotations in the text. A lone paper titled “Payment on Acct. of Panorama” tallies daily expenses relating to the building and preparation of the building ends with a total of \$7876.16, including expenses recorded from March 5 to June 22, 1838. However, immediately after that there is a further note that reads “Geo. W. Jackson Acct of Money paid to July 31, [18]38 =

Section A1) Probably similar in design and scale to the Boston panorama building, in New York nearly \$700 alone was spent on lumber for the circular structure and its stacked platforms, made to exhibit two panoramas simultaneously. The construction and finishing of this structure brought together a cross section of New York City's craftsmen, including ironsmiths, bricklayers, and housepainters. Their efforts were overseen by a site manager, Theodore L. Littlefield. Detailed daily expense records show the accumulating debts related to the building's construction alone. The purchase of materials, their carting and wages for laborers make up the majority of entries (including payment for the services of a Mr. John Rich, described as a colored waiter). Catherwood did not openly petition for subscribers or patrons to support his project, so he probably shouldered the entire burden of this initial building investment.<sup>207</sup>

Before Catherwood's Panorama buildings, there are few comparative examples for similar structures and their expenses. However, it is clear that erecting a new space for full-scale circular panoramas was a much steeper financial investment than less spatially demanding painting installations or adapting an existing exhibition space. With the introduction of stationary panoramic spectacles to America, temporary wooden buildings were erected to house the pictures on any available land. Like their featured entertainments however, these buildings—in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston—proved to be just as transient, and were

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8179.57.” This is a discrepancy of just over \$300 that raises questions about the exchange of money within the partnership of Catherwood and Jackson.

<sup>207</sup> “Payments on Acct. of Panorama,” Frederick Catherwood collection, [1836-1838], NYHS.

commonly disassembled following the close of the panoramic exhibition, their parts advertised for sale to “anyone wanting to purchase lumber...at a very low price.”<sup>208</sup>

Many panorama exhibitors attempted to keep building costs low in order to avoid eating into their profits, a strategy that at times resulted in disaster. For example, in late 1804, John H. Parker and Robert Jackson, the American proprietors of Englishman Robert Ker Porter’s semicircular panoramas of the Napoleonic battles of Alexandria and Lodi, were building a panorama building in Philadelphia to expand their prospects beyond New York City. In Philadelphia, Parker had struggled in his negotiations with local carpenters, finding that even a simple, “rough building” would cost them upwards of \$400. Jackson approved the expense but recommended Parker insist the building be equipped with “strong uprights and to be firmly fixed in the ground to prevent it being blown down.”<sup>209</sup> Jackson’s concern was not misplaced. Their Philadelphia building had not been open to the public two months before an “unfortunate accident” all but destroyed the painting of the Battle of Alexandria. “The panorama Building in this place was blown down last night and the painting tore in a most irreparable manner. It will not of course be again fit for exhibition thus from the frailness of the building.”<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> “Last Week of the Panorama,” *Charleston City Gazette* (SC), February 23, 1798; “Auction Sale, Two Panoramas & A Rotundo,” *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, September 1, 1830; “Removal of the Panorama, To the Editor of the Courier,” *Boston Courier*, November 30, 1837.

<sup>209</sup> Robert Jackson to John H. Parker, 14 November 1804, Letters to John H. Parker, Panorama collection, Getty Research Institute (hereafter cited as Parker letters).

<sup>210</sup> Robert Jackson to John H. Parker, 11 January 1805, Parker letters.

Twenty years before Catherwood, the artist John Vanderlyn had been perhaps the first American to attempt to build a permanent panorama building in New York City, a project that ultimately ruined him. At first, his prospects seemed good. Vanderlyn had the support of the city, which rented him a plot of land behind City Hall for the token rate of “one peppercorn per annum,” along with the financial support of 142 subscribers who contributed the substantial amount of \$8000. However, once construction began the project fell behind schedule and ran over budget. By the time Vanderlyn’s Rotunda opened he was still \$4000 in debt. His mismanagement of the enterprise forced him to declare insolvency, and eventually cost Vanderlyn the Rotunda itself, which was repossessed by the city in 1835. Catherwood may have been aware of this story as he undertook a similar project so soon after Vanderlyn’s failure.<sup>211</sup>

Later showmen, peddling newly adapted panoramic attractions such as stage mounted diorama spectacles or moving panoramas on rollers, only needed to worry about securing desirable rental spaces for their exhibitions. Times and rents had to be negotiated and secured, as English panorama exhibitor J.J. Story did while searching for accommodations for his *Panorama of a Tour Round the World* in 1869. His letters inquire about “the lowest terms for 2 days,” which suggests just how portable moving panoramas could be.<sup>212</sup> Successful negotiations for venues in new cities could make or

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<sup>211</sup> Avery and Fodera, *John Vanderlyn’s Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles*, 19.

<sup>212</sup> J.J. Story to unnamed, Portobello, near Edinburgh, to the Corn Exchange, Alnwick, Northumberland, January 15 and 18, 1869, Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.

break a speculation, as rental expenses could cut into profits. In preparing to open their dioramic stage spectacle, *The Conflagration of Moscow*, in Albany, New York, one of its proprietors, John Passarow, wrote to his partners about negotiating for use of the local Masonic Hall: “the Hall may be obtained for \$80 per week...but I think it may be had for \$50.”<sup>213</sup> Although W.E. Hutchings’ 1848 *Grand Classical Panorama of the Seas and Shores of the Mediterranean* ultimately lost money during its four month run at Boston’s Masonic Temple, he paid only \$25 a week for the space, a total of \$300 over the course of his exhibition.<sup>214</sup>

### The Paintings

Beyond securing and preparing an appropriate exhibition space, the biggest investment for an aspiring panoramic exhibitor was the canvas itself. Costs accumulated at each step of the process: acquiring preparatory drawings; paying for materials; time invested painting, or contracting qualified painters to execute the canvas.<sup>215</sup> Some simply invested in readymade panoramas that had already circulated

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<sup>213</sup> Passarow to Gragg, Tuesday, 20 July 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>214</sup> “Manuscripts, programmes, etc., relating to his Grand classical panorama of the sea and shores of the Mediterranean, executed by A. Hewins,” Allen A. Brown Theatre Collection, Special Collections, Boston Public Library (hereafter Manuscripts relating to panorama of the Mediterranean, BPL).

<sup>215</sup> Robert Burford, the proprietor of London’s primary panorama establishment, frequently secured drawings from artists, draftsmen, and explorers who had recently visited exotic locations of interest. As previously mentioned, Burford’s *Panorama of Jerusalem* was based upon Catherwood’s travels. Although further details of their business negotiation are unknown, some insight into Burford’s business dealings are revealed in the writings of British artist David Roberts. A prolific decorative and theatrical scene painter, Roberts worked briefly with Burford in 1847. As his notation in his record books make clear, in hindsight Roberts believed himself taken the fool by Burford. “This winter I disposed of the copy right of a Panoramic drawing of Grand

elsewhere. Catherwood chose this route. The six panoramas he exhibited in the United States were produced by his former business associate, Robert Burford, who owned the Leicester Square panorama in London. Burford's works were known and reported upon in America, where the press sometimes referred to him as "the first [or premiere] Panoramic Painter in the world."<sup>216</sup> Perhaps Catherwood hoped Burford's name and its cache would add appeal to his exhibition. Either way, he paid a considerable amount to acquire Burford's panoramas and bring them to the United States.

Catherwood and Jackson spent nearly \$6000 securing their panoramas, and paid an additional \$1450 transporting them across the Atlantic, insuring those trips, and paying other related miscellaneous fees. (table 1, sections A2 and A3) Each canvas, whether purchased individually or as a pair, cost roughly \$1000. The original canvases of Jerusalem and Niagara together were valued at \$2000.<sup>217</sup> Seven months after the initial late June 1838 opening of those panoramas in New York, Catherwood returned to London with \$980 dollars in hand to purchase a new panorama, of Thebes.<sup>218</sup> Five months after that, Catherwood spent \$975.55 to purchase Burford's

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Cairo to Robert Burford for Fifty Pounds, being at his own town. This was a mistake for had I charged £200, he would most probably have taken pains with it. As it was, he took none." Those £50 pounds were clearly a good investment for Burford, not cutting into his profits. Roberts, on the other hand, lost out. "Panorama of Cairo," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 181 (1847): 403; David Roberts (1796-1864) Record Books, Yale Center for British Art.

<sup>216</sup> "Panorama of the Superb City of Mexico," *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, September 10, 1829.

<sup>217</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 15.

<sup>218</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 4.



panorama of Lima.<sup>219</sup> Finally, the panoramas of Rome and New Zealand were purchased in April 1840 for \$2000.<sup>220</sup> The burden of this expense was compounded over time by the addition of “use of paintings” fees beginning in March 1839, which will be discussed below.

Transporting the massive canvases across the Atlantic was both an added expense and a financial risk that needed to be insured. (table 1, section A3) Records show that paying for the international freighting of the individual panoramas on America-bound packet ships typically cost between \$100 and \$300. Furthermore, in order to protect the paintings while in transit across the Atlantic, Catherwood and Jackson also took out insurance policies to cover their potential loses. Most often working with the Providence Washington Insurance Company, their premium of \$68.50 gave them up to \$4500 in insurance coverage. However, the insurance company sometimes declined to cover the trips, as indicated by an entry from May 19, 1840. A little under a month after the partners first paid for the policy, the Providence Washington Insurance Company declined “to continue the risk” of insuring the passage of Catherwood’s new panoramas of Rome and New Zealand to New York City. They did not approve of the chosen method of transportation, the steamer ship *British Queen*. Steamships were a newer technology, much faster than the older packet ships, but the insurance company regarded them as too risky.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 32. “Panorama Dr to Lafayette Bank, purchased of Prime, Ward & King their draft on Baring Brothers & Co London at 30 days’ sight in favor of Robert Burford for the Panorama of Lima for 200 sterling at 9 ¾ premium.”

<sup>220</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 108.

<sup>221</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 118.

There were several alternatives to purchasing and exhibiting an existing panorama that could be less expensive. Unlike the construction of his panorama building, paid for through investor subscriptions, John Vanderlyn shouldered the expenses for his *Panorama of Versailles* and produced it himself. He built a curved wall forty feet in length in a barn on his Kingston, New York property, purchased materials, and paid assistants to help with the painting, altogether to the tune of \$2000.<sup>222</sup> Vanderlyn's expenses were clearly much steeper than Catherwood's later purchases, perhaps because it took the former nine months to perfect his eighteen foot by one hundred and sixty-five foot panorama. With the popularization of the moving panorama format by the 1840s however, enterprising panoramacists found new ways to cover their expenses and produce their attractions more economically.

Some found investors or lenders to cover production costs. The artist Otis A. Bullard appealed to "noble hearted" Englishman George Doer's generosity, finding in him a patron for his panorama of Broadway in New York, which purportedly cost \$15,000 over four years to produce.<sup>223</sup> The details of Bullard's contract with Doer do not survive, but those of his contemporary, showman William E. Hutchings, do. In 1848, Hutchings set in motion a plan to produce what would become *Hutchings' Pictorial Map and Chart, or, Grand Classical Panorama of the Seas and Shores of the*

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<sup>222</sup> Avery and Fodera, *John Vanderlyn's Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles*, 24.

<sup>223</sup> "Miscellaneous. Young Men, Read This," *The North Star* (Rochester, NY), January 1, 1851. For more on Bullard's Moving Panorama of New York, see: Peter West, "The City in Frames: Otis Bullard's Moving Panorama of New York," *Common-Place* 11, no. 4 (July 2011) and Joseph E. Arrington, "Otis A. Bullard's Moving Panorama of New York City," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 44 (1960): 309-35.

*Mediterranean*.<sup>224</sup> Two surviving business contracts illustrate how Hutchings financed his project. A successful, 27-year-old dentist from Boston, Elton R. Smilie, provided the needed capital, agreeing to cover Hutchings expenses, including payments to the artist, Amasa Hewins. Smilie's support came with several heavy stipulations. In exchange for the cash, Hutchings gave Smilie legal ownership of the panorama and all related articles: the original sketches, copyrights for the printed pamphlet, and even the materials used in producing the piece, down to the paint brushes. Hutchings then agreed to lease the panorama for a period of two years, during which time he retained possession of it for exhibition. During this period, Hutchings was obliged to pay Smilie two thirds of the gross proceeds weekly, not including the required money to cover exhibition expenses. He was expected to "devote his whole time and best ability" to promoting the painting and was expected to keep the panorama in good condition and well insured. If any of those terms were not met, Smilie could legally repossess the panorama.

With money secured, exhibitors could hire out the actual work of painting the panoramas to artists looking for guaranteed employment and pay, or turn to young artists looking for a career boost.<sup>225</sup> For example, Hutchings' panorama of the Mediterranean was painted by Amasa Hewins (1795-1855), a Boston-based portrait

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<sup>224</sup> Hereafter to be referred to as the "panorama of the Mediterranean."

<sup>225</sup> Beginning in the late 1840s, this practice of hiring artists to create panoramas was known and not approved of by all. A writer for the *Boston Evening Transcript* wrote, "Banvard and Bayne have been the pioneers of this species of exhibition; and there are followers enough springing up in the rear. Dr. Townsend, a sarsaparilla vender in New York, is employing artists upon a grand panorama of the Hudson. We would rather see the artists themselves originating the enterprise and deriving the profit." "All the Rage," *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 3, 1848.

and landscape painter. Hewins' own sketches from a trip to Italy in the 1830s were the basis for the panorama, and he completed the work in just over two months, from March 25 to June 2, 1848.<sup>226</sup> During that time, he was paid an average of about \$56 dollars a week for "all materials, drawings, labor, and services."<sup>227</sup> His earnings totaled \$622.27 for two months of work. For his one-time venture into panorama production, Hewins was well paid.

The work notebook of New York City-based panorama-painter-for-hire, John Evers, makes that clear. Evers took panorama commissions from 1848 to 1853. In that time, he was paid for a number of services: for producing a full set of panorama preparatory sketches, producing a panorama in full on his own, and also for working as an assistant on another painter's panorama project. His pay varied depending on the project and the contract, but generally, Evers charged between twenty-five and thirty dollars a week. When he painted Dr. Townsend's moving panorama of New York, Evers charged \$1 per foot of panorama he painted. This was his most profitable commission, earning him just over \$1900. For at least six projects, Evers was paid anywhere from \$125 to nearly \$2000. In total, his work book records earnings of \$7118.68.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Hewins' diary from the 1830-1833 trip to Italy survives in the collections of the Boston Athenaeum and has been published. See: Francis H. Allen, ed., *Hewins's journal: A Boston portrait-painter visits Italy; the Journal of Amasa Hewins, 1830-1833* (The Boston Athenaeum, 1931).

<sup>227</sup> "Manuscripts relating to panorama of the Mediterranean," BPL. Hewins did receive two slightly higher payments of fifty-nine dollars on March 25 and \$59.27 on April 29, 1848.

<sup>228</sup> John Evers Notebook, 1848-1853, Winterthur Library.

By the “golden age” of moving panoramas in the late 1840s and early 1850s, panorama painting opportunities and commissions were readily available to those willing to take them. For example, in 1853, Dr. L.E. (Eaton) Emerson began exhibiting his “Grand Moving Mirror of California” throughout New England. (figure 3.9) Panoramic exhibitions of California began in 1849 to capitalize on public interest in gold rush fever. At least three separate moving canvases were exhibited in the next six years in cities across the country.<sup>229</sup> In contrast, Emerson took the exhibition he had purchased on the road to small towns across western Maine, northern Vermont, and New Hampshire (with one foray across the northern border to Stanstead in Canada). Unrolling his canvas in any building available, including halls, hotels, and school houses, Emerson added to his exhibition’s appeal by reporting that his panorama’s twenty-six scenes had been painted by “those eminent artists T.H. Badger and Fred Somerby of Boston, Mass.”<sup>230</sup>

Perhaps Boston’s role as a regional cultural center supported his claim, but Badger and Somerby were not as “eminent” as Emerson made it seem. Both were working artists in their thirties when they completed their *Panorama of California* in the early 1850s. They accepted the demands of the fickle artists’ trade, taking work

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<sup>229</sup> “Panorama of California,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), December 8, 1849; “Panorama of California,” *Albany Evening Journal*, August 6, 1850; “Marvin & Hawley’s Grand Original Panorama of California,” *Daily Missouri Republican*, January 10, 1851; “Craven’s Great Panorama of California,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 9, 1852; “Williamson’s ‘Mirror of Chagres River and Glimpses of the Golden Land of California,’” *St. Paul Pioneer* (MN), December 1, 1855.

<sup>230</sup> L.E. Emerson Diary, 1853-1855, Maine Historical Society. (hereafter Emerson Diary, MHS).

when it was offered rather than concerning themselves with producing only “fine art.” Thomas H. Badger (1820-1897) did come from a family of artists. His father Thomas and grandfather Joseph Badger had been respected portraitists in the Boston area throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By 1853, T.H. Badger had moved from the family home in Amherst, N.H. to work in Boston as a “portrait and landscape artist.” Just beginning to establish himself in a new city, Badger likely agreed to take on the *Panorama of California* to bring in extra income.<sup>231</sup> The same may have been true for his workmate, Fred[erick T.] Somerby, who spent most of his career across the river from Boston in Chelsea as a “sign and fancy chair painter.”<sup>232</sup> Occupied with more artisanal tradesman’s work, Emerson’s panorama would have been a unique project for Somerby. Having acquired his attraction at a reasonable price, Emerson, like all other panorama exhibitors, set out to “make our pile” in profits.<sup>233</sup> As many exhibitors found out, however, public interest and ongoing expenses were unpredictable, so a good initial investment could make or break a speculation.

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<sup>231</sup> Richard C. Nylander, *Joseph Badger, American Portrait Painter* (master’s thesis, Cooperstown Graduate Program, 1972); William David Barry, *Thomas Badger (1792-1868): Portrait of an American painter* (Kennebunk, ME: The Museum, 1993); Katrina Holman, “Restoration of Historic Painting of Barnabas B. David by Thomas H. Badger, 1884” (unpublished paper, Historical Society of Amherst, December 2014).

<sup>232</sup> *The Boston Directory* (Boston: Published by George Adams, 1869).

<sup>233</sup> Emerson Diary, September 12, 1853, MHS.

## The Evidence of Success and Public Opinion

With his lecture tour making Catherwood's name and expertise known across the east coast, and his New York panorama building completed by mid-June 1838, anticipation for the opening of the panorama venue was high. *The Evening Post* congratulated the city "on possessing at last a building in which these interesting and instructive productions of the pencil can be viewed with advantage," and where, "without the trouble of a journey to distant countries, we may gratify the strong desire which almost every body [sic] feels, of seeing, with the bodily eye, places renowned in history or described in the narratives of travelers."<sup>234</sup> Catherwood's employees kept detailed records of the panorama's daily profits, distinguishing the specific sources of revenue by the individual attractions and products sold. Section C of Table 1 shows that, in total, Catherwood's New York Panorama took in a total of \$20,863.56 between June 21, 1838 and October 30, 1841. Panorama ticket sales account for all but slightly over \$1800 dollars of those profits. With tickets advertised at twenty-five cents each, this indicates that at least 72,000 people visited Catherwood's panorama in just over two years.

Attendance at the panorama and corresponding profits followed particular patterns and provide a glimpse into unspoken public opinion about the allure of the spectacle itself. Two panoramas were always on view together, one larger, covering as much as 10,000 square feet of canvas, and the other substantially smaller, perhaps 3,000 square feet. The account book shows that each required a separate ticket. The larger panorama consistently brought in more money than the smaller. The large panoramas of Jerusalem, Rome, and Lima occupied the larger downstairs platform. In

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<sup>234</sup> *The Evening Post* (NY), June 19, 1838.

contrast, the smaller panoramas of Niagara, Thebes, and the Bay of Islands (New Zealand) occupied the upper platform of the building, up “another flight of thirty-five steps.”<sup>235</sup> Public interest not only in the subject matter but also their sheer size likely contributed to making Jerusalem and Rome the most profitable attractions at the New York Panorama.<sup>236</sup>

Like most public establishments of the antebellum era, the panoramas were open Monday through Saturday, and closed on Sunday for the Sabbath. The most popular and profitable days were Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. (table 2) This

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<sup>235</sup> “Catherwood’s Panoramas,” *North American and Daily Advertiser* (PA), October 24, 1840; “Panoramas of Jerusalem and Thebes,” *North American and Daily Advertiser* (PA), September 29, 1840. Satisfactory descriptions of the interior of Catherwood’s New York panorama do not survive, but those of the Boston Commons Building and the Coliseum building in Philadelphia provide a close approximation.

<sup>236</sup> The size argument does not fit when considering the Panorama of Lima. Exhibited from October 12, 1839 to March 8, 1840, Lima was the least profitable of all the panoramas excluding Niagara (although the majority of the time Niagara was exhibited in New York was not recorded in the Account Book). In its day-to-day earnings it did also take in more money than Thebes, the smaller format panorama it was exhibited with, but the proprietors must not have considered it appealing enough because it was taken down after five months and never exhibited again. Unlike the other panoramas, Lima also did not travel to any of the other satellite panorama buildings in Philadelphia or New Bedford. According to newspaper reports published after a fire destroyed the New York Panorama building in August 1842, Lima, which had been rolled up on the floor of the building, was destroyed in the fire along with Jerusalem, Thebes, and probably Niagara. Why Lima failed to attract larger interest cannot be definitively known, but lackluster comments in a review from May 1836, when the panorama first premiered in London, might provide a clue. “The panorama of Lima is not the least successful of Mr. Burford’s efforts. The colouring is rich and dazzling, giving, however, more the idea of a painted city than a real one. This is quite natural, for in most of the Spanish American cities the buildings are coloured and tinselled, and gilded with profuse gaudiness, and as little taste.” “Mr. Catherwood’s Panoramas,” *New-York Spectator*, August 6, 1842; “Burford’s Panorama of Lima,” *New Monthly Belle Assemblée* 4 (May 1836): 327.



reflects the popularity of illuminated evening exhibitions that were held on those evenings, created by “upwards of 200 gas lights,” the likely cause of the building’s fiery demise in August 1842.<sup>237</sup>

Because the panorama, lit primarily by the overhead glass skylight, was subject to the sun’s schedule, its proprietors were forced to explore dangerous artificial lighting to maximize the amount of time they could stay open. Over the course of its four year run, the proprietors of the Panorama experimented with artificial lighting and evening hours. In the summer of 1838, the panorama was open from nine in the morning until 10pm. However, its closing time was quickly shortened by a half hour, perhaps because of unsatisfactory evening attendance and difficulties controlling light levels.<sup>238</sup> The installation of gas lighting by October 1838 solved that problem, illuminating the panoramas every evening and accompanying lectures given by Catherwood at half past eight.<sup>239</sup> As announced in *The Evening Post*, “Mr. Catherwood attends from half past eight, explains and illustrates the painting. The commentary of one who is so intimately acquainted with the subject, from personal observation, cannot fail to be interesting and instructive.”<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> “Panoramas of Jerusalem and Thebes,” *New York Evening Post*, April 5, 1839.

<sup>238</sup> “The Panorama of Jerusalem – The Panorama of Niagara,” *New York Evening Post*, September 3, 1838.

<sup>239</sup> In addition to accruing massive bills for gas from the Manhattan Gas Light Company, maintaining the lamps themselves also became a constant expense. Entries throughout the Account Book record payments for cleaning, glazing, and replacing glass.

<sup>240</sup> *The Evening Post*, October 22, 1838.

In subsequent years, the cost of gas shaped evening hours further. By winter 1839, the paintings closed at dusk and reopened for evening illumination from six to nine pm. During their final winter in 1841, they were illuminated only on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings. That gamble clearly paid off. Daily profits from February to October 1841 show specific spikes in attendance on days with illuminated evenings, indicating that people clearly enjoyed contemplating the panoramas when they were lit via the novelty and romance of artificial lighting.<sup>241</sup>

Calculated monthly profits also show that audiences spent more time and money at the Panorama during the temperate weather months of the spring and fall. (table 3) Ticket sales routinely plummeted due to the heat in June, July, and August, and the cold of December, January, and February. Indeed, the negative effect of an oppressive heat on the profitability of public amusements was well known by showmen, and one with no easy remedy. For example, Ethan Allen Greenwood, proprietor of the “New England Museum” in Boston, frequently made notes in his account book about the weather. In July and August 1821, he consistently bemoaned the persistent heat, scribbling “hot,” “hottest day yet,” “very hot,” and “hotter than last Saturday” next to his records documenting poor ticket sales on certain days.<sup>242</sup> Catherwood’s accounts rarely include such personal commentary, but the wooden structure, with its glass skylight roof, undoubtedly baked in the summer sun.

In contrast, Catherwood fought the deep freeze of winter by investing to heat the Panorama. Advertisements during these months assured readers that “the building

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<sup>241</sup> Sandy Isenstadt, Margaret Maile Petty, and Dietrich Neumann, eds., *Cities of Light: Two Centuries of Urban Illumination* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>242</sup> New England Museum Folio, Ethan Allen Greenwood Papers, AAS.

throughout is warmed by a furnace, which renders the Rotunda a comfortable as well as fashionable place of resort.”<sup>243</sup> To feed that heat source, the Panorama made seasonal coal purchases, typically paying for two to four tons of coal, except for one notable exception in September 1839, when they purchased eighteen tons from Dusenberry, Lyon & Co. coal merchants for \$6.50 a ton.<sup>244</sup> Despite their efforts, the cold still deterred visitors to the Panorama.

Individual high grossing days indicate that certain holidays were very popular occasions for patronizing public amusements, including panoramas. After the Rotunda’s successful first year, it became much rarer for Catherwood’s panoramas to net more than sixty dollars in a single day. Over the course of the next three years, only Christmas Day and the Fourth of July continued to draw crowds large enough to swell profits more than sixty dollars in a single day, with the exception of the final two days of the *Panorama of Jerusalem* in October 1839. Each day brought in over \$100 dollars in profit, indicating that more than 800 people visited Jerusalem in those two days alone.

In this, the panorama was benefiting from the public quest for new ways to celebrate holidays. Following the American revolutionary triumph, citizens of all classes celebrated “independence day” in their own ways. Scholars like Susan G. Davis have shown that the “well to do and politically powerful” commemorated the day with formal dinners and public orations, while the working class turned the

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<sup>243</sup> “The Panoramas a Short Time Longer,” *New York Evening Post*, February 27, 1841.

<sup>244</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 66; *Longworth’s American Almanac: New York Register and City Directory* (New York: Published by T. Longworth, 1837), 221.

anniversary into a popular festival, celebrating in the streets, squares, and fields.<sup>245</sup> (figure 3.10) By the 1820s, a new breed of entertainment was emerging, tailored to the rising middle class flush with enough disposable income to indulge in commercial amusements. In the days surrounding popular holidays like the Fourth of July, newspapers published suggestions for how the public should celebrate the day “with unusual parade and splendor.”<sup>246</sup> Giving pride of place to parades over the course of the nineteenth century, these announcements were increasingly filled with notes on public amusements open to the public during the holidays, including theatres, “picture-galleries,” museums, public gardens, lyceums, circuses, and panoramas.<sup>247</sup> Catherwood’s establishment benefited from this festive atmosphere as “a favorite resort for the day and evening.”<sup>248</sup> The Panorama prepared accordingly, buying new flags and paying to mend old ones in order to festoon the Rotunda appropriately for the occasion.<sup>249</sup>

In addition to selling single admission tickets for twenty-five cents, the Panorama also made money through face-to-face negotiations at the ticket office. Although never advertised for the New York exhibitions, non-transferable season tickets were sold for \$1 and allowed the purchaser unlimited admission to both

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<sup>245</sup> Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 40-45.

<sup>246</sup> “Fourth of July,” *New York Spectator*, July 3, 1823.

<sup>247</sup> “Fourth of July,” *New York Spectator*, July 5, 1838; “The Fourth of July,” *New York Spectator*, July 6, 1840 (hereafter *New York Spectator*, 1840).

<sup>248</sup> *New York Spectator*, 1840.

<sup>249</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 46, 130, 194, 202.

panoramas for that year.<sup>250</sup> The 1837 Boston exhibition of Jerusalem and Niagara had explicitly announced the availability of season tickets, but in New York they existed as word of mouth. (figure 3.11) Entries in the account book sometimes record daily season ticket sales equaling less than the dollar price of the ticket. This indicates that Panorama staff likely talked visitors into upgrading their ticket after their visit and allowed them to pay the difference for the more expensive season ticket. Table 1, section C8 shows that season tickets accounted for over nine hundred dollars of recorded profits. Similarly, likely in response to demand and in an effort to appease visitors, individuals who wished to visit both panoramas in one visit could pay 37.5 cents, half off the second panorama ticket admission. That promotion had long been available at the box office before advertisements began promoting it.<sup>251</sup>

Finally, pamphlets that included schematic engravings of the major landmarks in the paintings, explanations of the engravings, and histories of the depicted cities proved to be very popular souvenirs. Modeled after similar pamphlets produced for Robert Burford's panoramas during their original exhibition at London's Leicester Square Panorama, in the United States, Catherwood commissioned new pamphlets for all six paintings.

With the London booklets likely on hand, Catherwood hired wood engravers, stereotypers, and printers to recreate and update the pamphlets for American

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<sup>250</sup> "Panoramas of Jerusalem and Niagara Falls," *Boston Post*, July 4, 1837.

<sup>251</sup> The two panoramas one price option begins to appear in advertisements for the Rotunda in 1841.

audiences.<sup>252</sup> Copper plates and other production materials for this kind of work rarely survive, but the plate for the engraving in the “View of Athens and Surrounding Country” panorama pamphlet exhibited at Harvard University from the 1820s-1840s provides some insights into available production choices and challenges. The print of Athens, etched on a copper plate clearly worn and reworked over time to extend its life, was produced from this single, large plate. (figures 3.12 and 3.13) Engraved numbers throughout identify figures or landmarks in the print that are described in the separate accompanying text. In contrast, breaks in the printed designs indicate that Catherwood’s engravings were the product of several smaller plates, a less expensive option, and perhaps more convenient for interspersing the engraving with a typed and printed key on the same page. (figure 3.14) Catherwood had booklets printed in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, in the latter city working primarily with the printer William Osborn.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Identifiable individuals with whom Catherwood did business when commissioning his books of description include: Joline J. Butler, “wood engraver” at 1 Ann Street; Benjamin F. Childs, “wood engraver” at 74 Fulton Street; William Osborn, “printer” at rear 88 William Street; Richard C. Valentine, “stereotyper” at 45 Gold Street; John S. Wright of “Smith & Wright,” stereotype founders at 216 William Street; *Longworth’s American Almanac, New York-Register* (New York: Published by Thomas Longworth, 1839).

<sup>253</sup> The Boston printing firm of Perkins and Marvin printed the first pamphlets for the panoramas of *Niagara Falls* and *Jerusalem* in 1837. Philadelphia printers Merrihew and Thompson created local pamphlets for *Thebes*. New York printer William Osborn printed pamphlets for all six of Catherwood’s panoramas. Although the *Panorama of Jerusalem* was exhibited in Philadelphia alongside *Thebes*, no pamphlets were printed with the Philadelphia Ninth and George Street location, indicating perhaps that the pamphlets were shipped to Philadelphia from New York, as was done with the *Bay of Islands* pamphlets when that panorama traveled to New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Catherwood's investment in printing proved lucrative. Over the course of the three years recorded in his account book, the pamphlets brought in almost two thousand dollars, more than the total recorded profits for either the panorama of Rome or the Bay of Islands. (table 1, section C9) A recorded expense of \$11.47 from August 31, 1840, likely a payment to Philadelphia printers "Merrihew and Thompson," described as "for 637 books of description for the panorama of Thebes, at \$18 per thousand," reveals the cost of printing.<sup>254</sup> Bundled and purchased in bulk in this way, each book cost less than two cents to produce. Charging twelve and a half cents per book made for an excellent profit return for the estimated 14,883 books sold in the years recorded in the account book.

Catherwood and his staff also worked industriously to make their Rotunda on the corner of Prince and Mercer Streets a respectable establishment and an appealing "place of resort." The Rotunda, located at what was then midtown Manhattan, was advertised as easily accessible, with "omnibuses constantly pass[ing] and repass[ing] the Panorama during the day and evening."<sup>255</sup> Weekly payments document faithful cleaning of the galleries, windows, and sidewalks. Care was taken to maintain and update the interior of the Rotunda by "papering" the hall, saloon, and gallery; "laying and painting [the] floor of [the] saloon," likely with a durable floor cloth; and mending worn stools, cushions, and the glass skylights.

To enhance the appearance and ensure the safety of their venue, Catherwood and Jackson also invested in improving New York City's urban infrastructure. They

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<sup>254</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 141.

<sup>255</sup> "Panorama of Jerusalem – Panorama of Niagara," *New York Evening Post*, September 3, 1838.

paid out of pocket to pave their street and successfully petitioned the Committee of the Common Council in 1838 “to place a large ornamental lamp on the corner of Broadway and Prince Street.”<sup>256</sup> When Fire Engine No. 18 jumped the sidewalk on January 15, 1840, destroying the lamp, Catherwood and Jackson petitioned the Committee on Lamps and Gas for remuneration. The Council declared that any person who ran an engine onto the sidewalk was accountable to the city’s citizens for any damages sustained. As a result, the city replaced the gas post and street lamp with “an ordinary one,” rather than the ornate lamp they had installed for the purpose of directing “the public to the Panorama.”<sup>257</sup>

Finally, the panoramas held a distinct appeal for leisure goers that was nurtured by its proprietors, along with the community and family-friendly reputation for which the attractions came to be known. A description of the *Panorama of Lima*’s first 1836 London exhibition gives unique insight into a panoramic exhibition’s charm compared to other contemporary popular amusements. “There is a *quiet* charm in this description of exhibition, affording much greater amusement to those who delight in more ‘lonely musings’ than the noisy bustle of a theatre, or the crowded ‘fashion’ of the concert rooms.”<sup>258</sup> Groups of family and friends could make a contemplative stop at the Panorama part of their evening plans. For example, Maria Annis Dayton, a twenty-

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<sup>256</sup> “Document No. 65, Board of Assistant Aldermen, March 2d, 1840,” in *Journal and Documents of the Board of Assistants, of the City of New-York*, vol. XV (Printed by order of the Board, 1840), 293-294.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> “Burford’s Panorama of Lima,” *New Monthly Belle Assemblée*, vol. 4 (May, 1836): 327.



three-year-old young woman enjoying the bustle of New York City, recorded in her diary in June 1838 that “Mr. and Mrs. Livingston asked Julia and me to go with them to the Panorama of Jerusalem and Niagara Falls. They are fine beyond all description.” Following that stop they continued on to Niblo’s Garden where they heard the band and a new tenor perform.<sup>259</sup> Likewise, in April 1839, New York Congressman Henry Meigs, along with his mother, wife Julia, and their daughter and son-in-law, Clara and Richard, went to see the *Panorama of Thebes* in the afternoon before dining together.<sup>260</sup> Catherwood’s panoramas and similar spectacles provided grand vistas and the calm atmosphere within which audiences could properly take them in: they were a genteel amusement.

In contrast to other New York attractions, however, the Panorama on Mercer and Prince Street was a venue open to people of color. Local newspapers sometimes printed accounts of groups who had recently been invited to examine the panoramas by the proprietor “on very moderate terms.” School groups, Bible and Sunday schools, even pupils from the “Deaf and Dumb Asylum” visited the enormous canvases. In January 1839, a group of 95 people associated with Zion Church, or Mother African Episcopal Zion Church, New York City’s oldest African American church, joined that list. “A Teacher in Zion School” wrote to *The Emancipator* to praise their visit and especially thank the agent, likely Jackson himself, “for his polite attentions.”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Laura Dayton Fessenden, ed. *Genealogical Story (Dayton and Tomlinson)* (Cooperstown, NY: Christ, Scott & Parshall, 1901): 91.

<sup>260</sup> Henry Meigs diary, 1 April 1839, Huntington Library.

<sup>261</sup> “Panorama of Jerusalem,” *The Emancipator* (NY), January 31, 1839.

Two years later, a similar article appeared in *The Colored American*. Its author recommended visiting the Panorama to view the pictures of Rome and the Bay of Islands, noting again that the venue was open to people of color but also recommending an optimal time of the day to visit in order to avoid harassment. They wrote, “the Panorama is not like most of the fashionable places of resort in our city, closed against the colored people, but admits them as it does other citizens. We should think it better, however to go in the day time when the scenes appear to about as good advantage, and when they will be less likely to be annoyed by visitors.”<sup>262</sup> Why Catherwood’s establishment had a more liberal visitor policy is uncertain. Perhaps it was because platforms were open to visitors throughout the day, or because their open spaces did not force close contact between different social groups. Perhaps Catherwood’s world travels had fostered in him a more liberal outlook, or his business sense led him not to deny admission to any prospective visitor capable of paying for a ticket. Whatever the case, he and his staff clearly did everything they could to cultivate visitors. On its own, this was a sound business strategy. It was also a shrewd decision considering the economic climate in antebellum America, the Panorama’s fluctuating profits, and the partners’ increasingly burdensome debts.

### **The Cost of Success**

With profits in excess of twenty thousand dollars recorded in the surviving Catherwood account book, it is understandable why, to this day, Catherwood’s New York Panorama is considered a runaway success. However, considering the Panorama’s profits alone as a marker of its success erases the larger social and

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<sup>262</sup> “A Visit to the Panorama” *The Colored American* (NY), April 3, 1841.

economic context within which the Panorama existed, and which challenged its very survival. At its core a business speculation, the public's loyalty and patronage could only carry the Panorama so far against the tidal wave of expenses its proprietors shouldered to keep that public interested. Maintaining revolving attractions, printing souvenir pamphlets, and paying for operations—a fashionable location, building maintenance, lighting, adequate staff, and a steady stream of advertisements—demanded money, capital to be paid out into an unstable economy where nothing was certain, not even the currency.

Frederick Catherwood arrived in the United States in the year leading up to the Panic of 1837, unfavorable circumstances for anyone hoping to funnel money into a new business. The growing capitalist economy of the first half of the nineteenth century was already prone to boom and bust cycles, but in the mid-1830s, it faced a deepening crisis of political conflict and federal mismanagement of America's under regulated banking sector. The reelection of Andrew Jackson in 1832 spelled the beginning of the end for the centralized Second Bank of the United States. Jackson ordered the transfer and redistribution of federal funds to state banks, effectively crippling the Second Bank of the United States and stripping it of any regulating power it once had over the rising number of privately chartered banks popping up throughout the United States. What followed was a "banking explosion" of bank note-issuing institutions of widely divergent stability: from 321 banks in 1830, that number ballooned to 531 in 1835 and 711 by 1840. This "wilderness of local banks" combined with other mounting domestic and international concerns prompted New York City banks to suspend specie payments on their notes on May 2, 1837. Banks throughout the nation followed in suit, kicking off the Panic of 1837. In such an uncertain

economic climate, it is reasonable to assume that there was more at play than just New Yorker's "apathy" for Catherwood's endeavor that kept both private individuals and local banks from providing him with the funds he needed to open his panorama the year he arrived.<sup>263</sup>

The instability of the economy continued to plague the Panorama following its opening in late June 1838. Without a unified banking system or currency, Catherwood was subject to the idiosyncrasies and fluctuations of the market, and also its seedy underbelly. The account book shows that in its first several years, the Panorama's funds were managed through Lafayette Bank of the City of New York. Within walking distance of the Panorama from its location at 425 Broadway, Lafayette Bank was a young upstart bank, chartered in 1834. Like many others, it failed in less than ten years. In 1842, an injunction was granted against the bank on the grounds that it had lost half its capital through mismanaged loans to its directors and improper land speculation. Probably aware of the declining reputation and circumstances of the bank, in November 1839 the Panorama was forced to transfer business from Lafayette Bank to Butchers & Drovers' Bank.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalisms, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 103-156; Peter L. Rousseau, "Jacksonian Monetary Policy, Specie Flows, and the Panic of 1837," *The Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 2 (June 2002): 457-488; Davies to Catherwood, 10 October 1836, NYHS.

<sup>264</sup> The entries that document the transition from Lafayette Bank to Butchers & Drovers' Bank are recorded on page 79 of the Account Book; James Smith McMaster, *McMaster's Commercial Decisions Affecting the Banker and Merchant*, vol. 19 (New York: The McMaster Company, 1916), 245; *Sound Currently 1895: A Compendium of Accurate and Timely Information on Currency Questions intended for Writers, Speakers and Students* (New York: Reform Club Sound Currency Committee, 1895), 291; J.H. Colton, *Historical, Geographical and Statistical View of the City of New*

The exchange of monies at the Panorama itself was a potential concern, as the venue was just the kind of “middling entrepreneur” that appealed to “shovers” of counterfeit notes. These petty criminals frequently targeted people or businesses with enough coins and small bills on hand to make change from their counterfeits, but lacking the expertise to recognize them immediately. The Panorama, whose most expensive individual sale item, a season ticket, was only one dollar, fit the bill perfectly. To combat this potential swindling, the Panorama faithfully purchased a “Note List” every two weeks. Throughout the antebellum era but especially after the bank explosion of the early 1830s, these cheaply published “Counterfeit Detectors” helped track counterfeit notes known to be in circulation and identified problematic banks.<sup>265</sup>

One of those up to date Note Lists helped Panorama attendant W.D. Adams identify a spurious note in January 1839. Philadelphia’s *Public Ledger* reported on January 30 that

a well executed spurious bill, which, on first view, appears to be a \$5 note on The Bank of Pennsylvania, but on closer inspection, purports to be on the Pennsylvania Savings Bank, was, on Thursday evening, passed to Mr. [W.]D. Adams, at the Panorama, in New York by some

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*York* (New York: Published by J.H. Colton & Co, 1836), 34. There are also several entries that attest to the complex nature of financial transactions within a market subdivided by competing banks all issuing their own bank notes. For example, on April 21, 1841, an entry reads, “Panorama paying cash to Jackson, who drew a check from Butchers’ & Drovers Bank, to meet a draft at Fulton Bank.” With so much counterfeit currency on the market suspicions ran high in financial transactions. Multiple transfers from bank to bank such as this were therefore necessary and helped solidify confidence in the monies changing hands.

<sup>265</sup> Mihm, 209-259.

person unknown, signed L.W. Ransom, President, and F.H. Duffes, Cashier.<sup>266</sup>

Based on this description, this was probably an altered note, where the counterfeiters erased key details from an extant but perhaps defunct bank note, rather than creating a totally fabricated one. The counterfeiters likely hoped that the public's superior confidence in the Pennsylvania Savings Bank over the Bank of Pennsylvania would fool the note's recipient. And indeed, the five-dollar note did pass at the Panorama before Adams realized something was amiss. Although only for five dollars, the note was still a loss for the Panorama and just one instance of a larger problem of the age and its impact on the Panorama's business.

In the midst of these broader concerns about the market's fundamental stability, Catherwood's panorama business also struggled with the day-to-day cost of maintaining the Panorama and its appeal as a fashionable leisure resort. By the late 1830s, New York City offered Catherwood an exciting array of new promotional, geographical, and infrastructural opportunities, which he harnessed in order to fashion his business's reputation. However, those choices in many cases came with a hefty price tag. Furthermore, these expenses, unlike the Panorama's profits, did not decrease over time. These expenses, the unseen and unconsidered side of exhibiting panoramas, ultimately made full scale, permanent panorama attractions like Catherwood's unsustainable in the United States.

Sweeping changes in American print culture beginning in the early 1830s made the antebellum press a keen ally for Catherwood in publicizing his attractions, both locally in the New York area and nationwide. His business records along with the

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<sup>266</sup> "Spurious Bank Bill," *Public Ledger* (PA), January 30, 1839.

enormous archive of surviving advertisements show that Catherwood utilized the press to his advantage. Advertisements were placed for all of his panoramas in over forty newspapers published throughout the east coast, amounting to over \$1100. (table 1, section B6) Although not an exact correlation, comparing charts of calculated monthly profits to calculated monthly advertisement buys shows a general relationship between the two. (table 4) For example, following the drop in profits after October 1839 into the winter months, money invested in purchasing ad space steadily increased through May 1840, when profits rebounded. Generally, spikes in advertising expenses are seen in the less temperate summer and winter months, when Catherwood was attempting to bolster sagging ticket sales.<sup>267</sup>

Catherwood and his staff targeted key consumer groups at critical moments through advertisements published in the rapidly increasing array of inexpensive newspapers on the market. The list of newspapers where Catherwood had advertisements placed shows the diversity of advertising options available at the time. (table 5) The publication of the *New York Sun* in September 1833 had inaugurated the age of “penny papers,” popular daily newspapers sold for the reduced cash-and-carry price of a single penny an issue. The Panorama’s records show that they advertised heavily in newspapers like these, including *The New York Sun*, *New York Star*, *New York Herald*, *New York Tribune*, and *The Evening Post*. Additionally, at different times the Panorama also advertised in religious publications like *The New York Evangelist*, *The Churchman*, *The Catholic Register*, *The Religious Intelligencer*, and

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<sup>267</sup> Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 37-48.

*The Protestant Vindicator*, hoping to attract the devoted, whose faith made the *Panorama of Jerusalem* particularly appealing.

Finally, Catherwood was certainly aware that his enterprise would not survive by relying solely on local spectators. New York City leisure seekers were a market that quickly became saturated the longer the *Panorama* remained open. As a result, Catherwood sought new spectators from outside the city and even from out of state at critical moments. For example, in preparation for the first major rotation of the *Panorama of Jerusalem* out of the New York Rotunda, Catherwood issued a special series of advertisement “cards” in late July 1839. Originating in local newspapers such as *The Evening Post*, Catherwood’s card was disseminated into New England at his published request. An advertisement in Brooklyn’s *Long-Island Star* (figure 3.15) illustrates that papers such as the *Newark Daily Advertiser*, *Long-Island Star*, *The Hudson River Chronicle*, *Hartford Courant*, *New Haven Palladium*, and *New London Gazette* were “requested to insert the above [card announcing the closing of the panorama of Jerusalem] twice a week till Oct. 1, and send their bills to this office for collection.”<sup>268</sup> Outgoing payments in the account book correlate that those papers did as requested and therefore put notice of the *Panorama of Jerusalem* before wider audiences. Indeed, during their four years on exhibition in New York, advertisements for Catherwood’s panoramas reached as far south as Richmond, Virginia, and as far north as Providence, Rhode Island and Boston, Massachusetts. They also appeared in the newspapers of major cities in between, including Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington D.C. Investing in newspaper advertisements allowed Catherwood to

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<sup>268</sup> “A Card – The Panoramas,” *New York Evening Post*, July 24, 1839; “A Card – The Panoramas,” *The Long-Island Star* (Brooklyn, NY), August 1, 1839.



enlarge the Panorama's market, and it was an expense they could control. That was not necessarily the case with the Panorama's other major ongoing expenses: rent, painting lease payments, illuminating gas, and staff.

In selecting the location for his panorama, Catherwood chose an area near the fashionable thoroughfare of Broadway, on the northern outskirts of the Eighth Ward where new commercial and residential land was being developed, sold, and rented. The Panorama sat directly across from Niblo's Garden, a fashionable outdoor leisure resort that marked the uppermost border of the entertainment offerings clustered around Broadway to the south.<sup>269</sup> Since the turn of the nineteenth century, showmen had established their public amusements in lower Manhattan in the blocks surrounding the City Commons (now City Hall Park). For decades prior to Catherwood's Panorama, the area had been populated with numerous commercial amusements, including the Shakespeare Gallery, the Park Theatre, the Vauxhall Gardens, John Vanderlyn's own panorama building and several museums, including Gardiner Baker's American Museum, John Scudder's Museum and "Spectaculum," and later, P.T. Barnum's own American Museum. Although easily connected to this entertainment hub via Broadway, in renting near Niblo's Garden, Catherwood did put his business a fair distance from that activity.

Even so, Catherwood paid a substantial ground rent bill of \$2000 a year, making his rent at Prince and Mercer Streets the Panorama's most substantial expense.

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<sup>269</sup> Mark Caldwell, *New York Night: The Mystique and its History* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 80-84; Thomas Gannett, "A History of Pleasure Gardens in New York City, 1700-1865," (PhD diss., New York University, 1978), 336-9; Naomi J. Stubbs, *Cultivating National Identity through Performance*. 2013.

(table 1, section B2) This plot of land was owned by William B. Astor, son of John Jacob Astor.<sup>270</sup> Their family was one of the wealthiest in New York City, due in no small part to John's rapid land purchases throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. This laid the foundation for his family's future real estate empire and fortune, which he passed on to his sons. During its first few years in operation, the Panorama paid William Astor quarterly, but by November 1839 had switched to monthly payments of \$166.66.<sup>271</sup> In total, rent payments recorded in the Catherwood account book equaled more than \$6700 dollars, but likely came to over \$8000 through July 1842, when the building burned down.

The subdivided nature of antebellum lease agreements meant that Catherwood was obligated to pay ground rent along with taxes and assessment costs on the land, and the Panorama did just that in 1838, 1839, and 1840.<sup>272</sup> This inevitably worked to the benefit of the landowner over the leaseholder, as the 1827 court case between John Jacob Astor and his tenant, the proprietor of the Vauxhall Gardens, showed. Astor's lease specified that the land could only be used as a garden, obliging his tenant, Mr. Madden, to pay \$750 rent at all events, and also to pay the assessment costs to open streets through his garden, even though that destroyed the property for the only purpose he could contractually apply it. After several appeals, the judge acknowledged the unfairness of the situation and ordered Astor to share some of the assessment costs

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<sup>270</sup> The Astor family papers are housed at the New York History Society (MS Collection 25), including materials pertaining to William B. Astor.

<sup>271</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 76.

<sup>272</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 16, 100, 170.

with Madden. However, in retaining ownership of the land and later developing it into residential housing following the garden's destruction, Astor still came out ahead.<sup>273</sup> Catherwood's relationship with William Astor appears to have been much less contentious, but nevertheless the cost of renting this land for commercial use locked the Panorama into a steep expense that, over the course of time, became more difficult to pay due to dwindling profits.

As previously discussed, in order to maintain the interest of the public, Catherwood and Jackson acquired six panoramas in total from Robert Burford in London. While the account book documents that they spent nearly \$6000 dollars securing those canvases, it also records monthly payments made by the Panorama for "use of the paintings." (table 1, section B1) This began on March 1, 1839, monthly payments of \$166.67 that in total amounted to \$2000 paid over the course of a year. In total, the account book records just over \$5330 dollars in "panorama use" or rental fees, the second highest expense they paid after ground rent to Astor. This expense is curious, as it is not clear who was receiving these payments. The most likely explanation is that the panorama paintings were acquired with only down payments and Catherwood and Jackson were then required to pay in monthly installments the remaining balance. If so, they paid a hefty toll to operate their business in America!

The next greatest expense at the Panorama was its gas lighting. (table 1, section B3) Although the space was lit from above by skylights created by New York City glass cutter Lewis Halloran, the large Rotunda was also equipped with shaded gas light fixtures that added additional light to the Panorama's interiors, especially in the

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<sup>273</sup> Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 160.

evenings. Gas as a viable light source was a relatively recent phenomenon. Viable gas could be extracted from natural resources like wood and animal fats, but it was gas production from coal that propelled the availability of gas light in American public spaces and domestic interiors on a wide scale by the mid-1820s. Considered a curiosity and exhibition spectacle unto itself and displayed in early American museums, gas lighting revolutionized American theaters and exhibition spaces beginning in 1816. That year, the Chesnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia was the first in the United States to be fitted for gas lights. In New York, all major theaters were equipped with gas light by November 1827, when the Park Theatre on City Hall Park embraced the new technology. (figure 3.16) The volatility of gas and the very real possibility of it sparking fire was understood since Philadelphia's Chesnut Street Theatre burned in 1820, just four years after gas was installed and several years before any New York theaters turned to gas. However, it was a risk that entertainment institutions were willing to take in order to have the "clear, soft light over audience and stage" that gas lighting provided.<sup>274</sup>

Gas for the Panorama was provided by the Manhattan Gas Light Company, and Catherwood along with his staff clearly struggled with assessing the building's gas needs and managing the resulting gas bills. The Manhattan Gas Light Company was the second gas company to be incorporated in New York City, following seven years after the New York Gas Light Company opened for business in 1823. While the New York Gas Light Company provided gas for lighting lower Manhattan exclusively, beginning in 1830, the Manhattan Gas Light Company supplied gas to the

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<sup>274</sup> Frederick Penzel, *Theatre Lighting Before Electricity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 47-52.

city north of Grand Street. The Panorama was situated three blocks north of that divide.<sup>275</sup>

The Panorama's monthly charges from the Manhattan Gas Light Company indicate that in their first year, the staff did not adequately understand what their lighting needs for the large Rotunda building would be, resulting in excessive use and two spectacularly high bills totaling over \$1600 in November and December 1838. (table 6) That mistake deeply indebted Catherwood to the gas company. For months into 1839, funds were diverted to pay the gas company "on account." However, following that initial winter, the lighting in the Panorama became less of a problem for its proprietors. Subject to seasonal fluctuations depending on natural light levels, after April 1839 the monthly gas bill never exceeded \$150 dollars. Furthermore, their gas expenses dropped to less than \$75 a month following the decision in 1841 to only light their panoramas in the evenings on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Ticket sales totaled by day show that the public visited the Panorama more frequently on its lit evenings than its dark days. However, that the Panorama staff resorted to adopting measures that reduced their expenses does suggest that there was a strain on the business by the 1840s.

The unsustainability of Catherwood's Panorama is also reflected in the fate of its full-time staff. Over the course of its four years open, the Panorama employed many people on a short-term basis. For example, just before Christmas 1838, the *Panorama of Jerusalem* "from its immense weight broke [its] fastenings and fell

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<sup>275</sup> William Paul Gerhard, "The Development and Progress of the Gas Industry in Greater New York," *Engineering Review* (November, 1900): 1-3; Henry Moscow, *The Book of New York Firsts* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 120.

down.”<sup>276</sup> In the three weeks following the accident, nearly \$140 dollars were paid to a sail maker, carpenter, artist, and a crew of workmen to repair the picture and return it to exhibition readiness.<sup>277</sup> These hired hands likely encountered the small but loyal full-time staff, Theodore L. Littlefield and W.D. Adams, that from opening day handled the everyday operations of the Rotunda.

Littlefield acted as the building manager at the New York Panorama, and also supervised the construction and initial promotion of the buildings in Boston, Philadelphia, and New Bedford.<sup>278</sup> Listed in Boston city directories published before 1839, Theodore L. Littlefield had worked as a housewright for the firm of Marshall Drury M. & Co. before striking out on his own and accepting employment with Catherwood that would take him from Massachusetts.<sup>279</sup> In contrast, Adams was hired in New York as an attendant for the Panorama and probably handled a number of tasks including opening and closing the Rotunda, selling tickets and souvenirs, and handling the till at the end of the evening (it was Adams who noticed the counterfeit five dollar

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<sup>276</sup> “Panorama of Jerusalem,” *The Mercury and Weekly Journal of Commerce* (NY), January 3, 1839; *New York Spectator*, December 24, 1838.

<sup>277</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 7-8; The sail maker was likely Peter R. Valleau, who with his father worked as a sail maker, and the artist Peter Grain. A “D. Haigo” is listed as paid for repairing the picture and was perhaps the carpenter, but his identity cannot be verified in New York City directories. This was not the only time Catherwood hired a sail maker. On page 22, expenses listed for March 28, 1839 also note two dollars paid to a “sail maker for sewing Thebes.” *Longworth’s American Almanac, New York Register and City Directory* (New York: T. Longworth, 1839), 290, 664 (hereafter Longworth’s almanac, 1839).

<sup>278</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 2, 112-113, 204.

<sup>279</sup> *Boston Directory and the City Register* (Boston: Charles Stimpson, Jr., 1838), 250.

bill in January 1839).<sup>280</sup> As Catherwood's partner or more likely, as his agent, George W. Jackson may have been on hand most days, but he did not receive a weekly salary like Littlefield or Adams.

Changes to their weekly salaries reflect not only the nature of their work contracts but by 1841, also the waning health of the business. Littlefield was paid a set amount every week to be on hand. He started at \$12 a week but by October 1839, was earning \$15. When traveling to Philadelphia and New Bedford to set up those satellite buildings in 1840 and 1841, the Panorama also covered all of his travel expenses. In contrast, Adams was likely paid by the hour, as his recorded weekly salary payments varied from week to week and were almost never an even dollar amount. Instead, his pay checks varied down to minute penny amounts but were generally between fifteen and seventeen dollars weekly.

However, as with their gas bill, in early 1841, policy changes reflect the Panorama proprietors' conscious efforts to reduce their expenses and combat the fallout of their falling profits. With the opening of the Philadelphia "Coliseum" at Ninth and George Streets in the Fall 1840, Littlefield disappeared from the weekly expenses list in the New York Panorama account book, indicating that he may have stayed on to help with the new building. (figure 3.17) He was replaced by O.H. Crosby, who began working for less than Littlefield earned, \$10 a week. From then on, both he and Adams saw continual gradual reductions to their salaries. By February 1841, Crosby was being paid \$8 a week, by May, down to \$5. In the fall 1841, Crosby

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<sup>280</sup> Longworth's almanac, 1839, 53.

was gone and replaced with “G.H. Wilcox’s son,” who was paid a mere \$3 a week.<sup>281</sup> Adams’ hourly rate or paid work hours were also cut, reducing his weekly pay from \$15-\$17 dollars to between \$12-\$13 dollars a week. After gas bills, employee salaries were the next highest expense incurred at the Panorama, so Catherwood’s attempt to reduce those expenses is perhaps understandable. (table 1, section B4) However, besides reducing outgoing payments, relying on new, young, and less well trained staff could also result in unintended but ultimately ruinous accidents.

### **Conclusion**

The end of Catherwood’s surviving account book on October 30, 1841 leaves the state of his New York business affairs in its final nine months a mystery. In addition, it is difficult to assess what the cumulative health of his finances were when adding in the impact of his panorama enterprises in Philadelphia and New Bedford, the former still open for business at the time of the New York fire. However, assuming that they also over time experienced shrinking profits alongside ever persistent upkeep and expenses, one might wonder whether Catherwood felt an underlying sense of relief when the entire New York Panorama was destroyed on the evening of July 29, 1842.

Newspapers throughout the country lamented the destruction of these “cities of canvas,” and placed the blame for the tragedy on a violent thunderstorm and bolt of lightning many eyewitnesses saw hit the building and likely ignite its gas lighting system. New Yorker Philip Hone described the fire as “a huge cauldron” that brought

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<sup>281</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 211. G.H. Wilcox is listed as a “Constable” in Longworth’s city directory.



down the entire building and destroyed everything inside. This included all of the panorama canvases except for Rome and the Bay of Islands, which were being exhibited in Philadelphia.<sup>282</sup> Rumors estimated the loss to Catherwood to be anywhere between \$10,000 and \$20,000 dollars. It is unknown whether or not these assets were insured at the time of their destruction. On May 29, 1840 Catherwood had paid the Eagle Insurance Company to insure the Panorama building for \$6000 and the paintings for \$2000.<sup>283</sup> If he renewed that policy over the course of the next two years he may have recouped some of his investment.

Catherwood's Panorama was the last attempt in the United States to establish a permanent panorama exhibition space for the large format, three hundred and sixty degree circular panoramic installations. Four years after the 1842 fire, American-born John Banvard introduced the moving panorama. (figure 3.18) In this format, the still immense panorama canvas was suspended between two rollers and cranked before a seated audience in a theater or exhibition hall. This changed the nature of panorama exhibitions forever. Now portable and adaptable to various spaces, the moving panorama guaranteed the itinerancy of this entertainment form throughout the rest of its American lifespan, into the second half of the nineteenth century. The showmen and artists who followed in Catherwood's wake now had a better formula for achieving their own success, freed from the unsustainable dream of permanence and

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<sup>282</sup> Hone, quoted in Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, 322. I can find references to the *Panoramas of Rome and the Bay of Islands* through May 1843, after which they disappear. "Exhibitions," *The North American and Daily Advertiser* (PA), May 10, 1843.

<sup>283</sup> Catherwood Account Book, 120.

better able to seek out “the great masses of people upon whose support the success of [this type] of exhibition depended.”<sup>284</sup> Even for this new generation however, their success depended on their having a keen business acumen and ability to predict temperamental spectator preferences just as much, if not more, than any inherent or hired artistic skill.

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<sup>284</sup> Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists* (Woburn, MA: The News Print, 1900), 43.

## Chapter 4

### REVOLUTIONARY PANORAMAS: ANTEBELLUM ENTERTAINMENT AND THE EXPLOITATION OF AMERICAN SYMPATHIES

The Greeks still battle to be free  
And Claim their ancient Liberty.  
Their beauteous Isles so fairly fac'd,  
Are still by Turkish hands disgraced: -  
And Christians offer up their prayers,  
To Heaven to prosper their affairs;  
Well known it is Heaven's decree,  
That "Men who will it can be free."<sup>285</sup> – 1824

And how the Pole, the noblest of the brave,  
Sinks, with his broken brand, on freedom's grave.  
Alas for Poland! Many a land has known  
Beneath a tyrant's iron yoke to groan;  
They oft have fall'n, who nobly would be free,  
But ne'er with woe like those that burst on thee!<sup>286</sup> - 1832

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<sup>285</sup> Benjamin Russell, *The Fortieth Annual Address, of the Carriers of the Columbian Centinel, to Its Patrons: With the Best Wishes and Salutations of the Season, for January 1, 1824*, Boston: B. Russell, 1824, Harris Collection of American Poetry and Plays, John Hay Library, Brown University (hereafter Harris Collection, John Hay Library).

In the Winter of 1848, when young Boston-based artist Benjamin Champney was in Paris learning the “French way” of executing a panorama, revolution broke out on the afternoon of February 23. He recalled the chaos that followed: the great crowds of people in the Place de la Concorde, the “insurgents” raising barricades and soldiers filling the boulevards, the crowds sacking the Palace after the King, Louis Philippe, fled to England. Although the “February Revolution” ultimately proved unsuccessful, upon returning to the United States Champney did not let his eyewitness knowledge of these events go to waste. When his celebrated *Panorama of the River Rhine* opened in 1849 at Boston’s Horticultural Hall, it was accompanied by four tableaux of scenes of the French Revolution of 1848, advertised as “painted from actual observation and participation in the events they are designed to illustrate.” (figure 4.1) While the marriage of panorama and tableaux subject matter was perhaps awkward, in presenting the latter Champney joined a long list of artists and showmen who had attempted to entice American spectators to their exhibitions with views of foreign riots, rebellion, and revolution.<sup>287</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, American audiences were presented with numerous panoramic attractions that depicted war-torn landscapes and battlefields or the unfolding events of revolutionary crises. Prior to 1820, the first “battle panoramas” in the United States came directly from Europe, seeking a new market and new

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<sup>286</sup> Samuel Coate Atkinson, *Address of the Carriers of Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post, to Their Patrons: On the Commencement of the Year 1832*, Philadelphia: S.C. Atkinson, 1832, Harris Collection, John Hay Library.

<sup>287</sup> Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years' Memories of Art and Artists*, 88-93; “Champney’s celebrated picture of the River Rhine!,” broadside. Boston, 1849, Boston Athenaeum (hereafter BA).

audiences. They represented major victories and defeats from Napoleon Bonaparte's career, including the Battles of Lodi (1796), Alexandria (1801), Paris (1814), and Waterloo (1815).<sup>288</sup> United States history was also a common subject for these popular exhibitions. Attractions like Lewis, Bartholomew & Co.'s *Grand Historical Moving Diorama of the Battle of Bunker Hill* brought the American Revolution to the stage beginning in the 1840s. A slew of quickly-produced moving panoramas in the 1860s memorialized the unfolding events of the American Civil War.<sup>289</sup> Occasionally, even local "revolutionary" strife became the subject of panoramic spectacle, as in 1845, when the Rhode Island "Dorr Rebellion," a minor two-month battle-less revolution

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<sup>288</sup> "Grand Panorama of the Battle of Alexandria," *American Citizen* (NY), August 18, 1804; "Grand Historical Painting, The Battle of Lodi," *New York Evening Post*, January 16, 1805; "Magnificent Panorama of the Battle of Paris," *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, March 12, 1818; "Grand Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 17, 1818.

<sup>289</sup> "The Grand Historical Moving Diorama of the Battle of Bunker Hill," broadside. Worcester, MA, 1851, American Antiquarian Society (hereafter AAS). For more information, see: Joseph Earl Arrington, "Lewis and Bartholomew's Mechanical Panorama of the Battle of Bunker Hill," *Old-Time New England* 52, no. 186 (Fall 1961): 81-89. In the 1860s, panoramic entertainments depicting the American Civil War were either moving panoramas or, towards the end of the conflict, more commonly magic lantern or "stereopticon" shows that used machines and painted glass slides to project scenes to immense size. The Library Company of Philadelphia has a large collection of playbills advertising these Civil War entertainments. See, for example: Harry H. Davis, "America and the Great Rebellion!" broadside. Philadelphia, 1861, Library Company of Philadelphia (hereafter LCP); "Monroe & Michener's Great American rebellion," broadside. Philadelphia, 1863, LCP; Samuel Freidly, "Grant Exhibition and Lecture... a series of splendid views... of the Present war," broadside. 1861-1865, LCP; "The Stereopticon of the American Civil War," broadside. Philadelphia, after 1862, LCP; "Grand historic mirror of the American war," broadside. Allentown, PA, 1863, LCP; "Goodwin & Woodward's Polyorama of the War!," broadside. Frankford, PA, 1864, LCP.

concerning universal men's suffrage in the state, appeared as a moving diorama before audiences at Providence's Cleveland Hall.<sup>290</sup> (figure 4.2)

Scholarship has traditionally shown preference to panoramic exhibitions of American subjects, but both domestic and international events were immortalized in this way.<sup>291</sup> Nineteenth-century panoramic exhibitions just as frequently, if not more often, featured international subject matter. These exhibitions present a dilemma that panoramas representing American scenery seemingly have not. After all, as art historian Lillian Miller wrote in 1951, American subject matter in panoramas was "more meaningful to an expanding, continent-conscious age."<sup>292</sup> Miller's perspective was guided by the American exceptionalism that dominated scholarship of the era, but strains of this set of assumptions have survived. Steven Oettermann, in *The Panorama: History of a Mass Media*, written in 1980 and still a leading reference on this subject, argued that

Americans were interested in their own country and the American frontier they were pushing westward. The states on the eastern seaboard looked not to the East toward Europe, from which they had just won

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<sup>290</sup> John Mason, "Moving Diorama of the R. Island Revolution," playbill. Providence, RI, 1845, Sidney S. Rider Collection, John Hay. For more information on the Dorr Rebellion, see: Russell J. DeSimone, *The Dorr Rebellion, an Overview* (Middletown, RI: Bartlett Press, 2009).

<sup>291</sup> See for example, historian Joseph Earl Arrington's extensive work on panoramas published from the 1950s to the early 1980s, almost all exclusively examining panoramas depicting American subjects.

<sup>292</sup> Lillian Miller, "John Vanderlyn and the Business of Art," *New York History* 32, no. 1 (January, 1951), 40.

their independence only a short while before, but to the West, where the country's economic and political future lay.<sup>293</sup>

The recent global turn in American history has called into question assumptions about America's insular focus, especially in the long nineteenth century. New studies documenting the flow of information, ideas, economic ties, and cultural products between the U.S. and other countries exemplify America's transatlantic and even global connections following its political independence from Great Britain.<sup>294</sup> Panoramic shows, as both a transatlantic visual medium and consumer leisure product, provided American spectators with a glimpse beyond their shores, at landscapes and events across the world that were of keen interest to them.

Explanations of the prevalence of European cityscape panoramas in America center on the idea that they were an early tool for virtual or "armchair" travel and tourism. Period newspaper advertisements for these attractions confirm this imagined utility, arguing that "to this kind of exhibition a large class of citizens...are indebted for the correct ideas and impressions which they now possess, of many celebrated places and cities in different parts of the Globe...and that without travelling beyond

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<sup>293</sup> Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 323.

<sup>294</sup> See, for example: Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: UVA Press, 2009); W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in an Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2013); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Kariann Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary American Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

the walls of their own respective cities.”<sup>295</sup> Some scholars have argued that panoramas of ancient cities provided a substitute for the “Grand Tour,” especially beneficial for Americans, most of whom would never be able to afford an extended journey throughout Europe.<sup>296</sup> These explanations suggests very little about what American spectators actually saw when they viewed these “Grand Tour” cityscapes, or consider what contextual knowledge guided their examinations.

As evidenced by the reactions of some panorama visitors, a general appreciation of the ancient splendor of Grand Tour cities was overlaid with an active knowledge of the modern changes and unfolding conflicts taking place in those cities. For example, following a trip to Frederick Catherwood’s *Panorama of Jerusalem* in New York, one spectator reported that

as we lately gazed at Catherwood’s splendid panorama of Jerusalem...we endeavored to recall the departed glory of the once holy city...but the attempt was in vain. On every side were the visible proofs of Turkish dominancy, and on the very site of the holy temple, shone the grand and imposing mosque of Omar.<sup>297</sup>

Appreciating the remnants of antiquity and the birthplaces of the Judeo-Christian religions could not be done without also reckoning with the more modern events and history shaping the landscapes represented in panoramic form.

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<sup>295</sup> “Communication – Panorama Painting,” *Charleston Southern Patriot*, March 3, 1835.

<sup>296</sup> See for example Dietrich Neumann, “Instead of the Grand Tour: Travel Replacements in the Nineteenth Century,” *Perspecta*, 41, *Grand Tour* (2008): 47-53.

<sup>297</sup> “Lament of the Jews,” *Milwaukee Weekly Sentinel*, February 9, 1841.



Some spectators acknowledged that, in visiting new panoramas, they were gazing upon actively endangered landscapes, soon potentially the victims of political and religious conflicts rocking the globe in the nineteenth century. The report of an English visitor to the recent London premiere of a *Panorama of Constantinople*, published in American newspapers in 1829, wrote that it was fortuitous that the scene was on view at that moment because, “in six short months, [Constantinople] may present a very different appearance; for the storm-clouds of war now rolling from the North may, ere that time, descend upon it with desolating fury.”<sup>298</sup>

This chapter examines two antebellum panoramic exhibitions to show how this amusement form at times intersected with the American public’s international preoccupations, particularly the republican revolutions that broke out in waves across the world in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first case study focuses on the circular *Panorama of Athens* that was acquired from England and brought to the United States in 1820, just before the outbreak of violence in Greece that became the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832). Although originally conceptualized as a visual aid for Harvard College students and other elite Americans with a passion for classical antiquity, the panorama’s American exhibition at the height of the Greek Revolution transformed it. Accessible to the broader public swept up in “Greek-mania,” the panorama represented not just Athens, the birthplace of western civilization, but an endangered landscape and culture deserving of American sympathy and aid.

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<sup>298</sup> “Panorama of Constantinople,” *New York Spectator*, October 6, 1829. Although not on the same scale, a “panorama view of the great City of Constantinople” was exhibited in Boston, at the Museum in Boylston Hall, in 1815. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 3, 1815.

The second half of the chapter examines the efforts of Baltimore Museum proprietor, Joseph E. Walker, to commission a “peristrepic” panorama of the “Late Polish Revolution.” Although less well known than the Greek Revolution, the failed Polish November Uprising (1830-1831) captured the attention of the American public, especially in 1834 when hundreds of Polish exiles seeking asylum arrived in the United States. Walker intended his panorama to illustrate the revolution for a sympathetic public then eager to assist the Polish exiles and learn more about their struggles.

Panoramic exhibitions, then, were not simply immersive escapes into exotic and “timeless” destinations. In certain instances, they were also visual aids that accompanied the “Foreign News” of the day, read by knowledgeable Americans in the growing assortment of daily and weekly newspapers available to them. The steady stream of news from abroad regarding events like the Greek War of Independence and the Polish November Uprising was eagerly received by middle class Americans, whose Christian morality and growing nationalism produced a sense of kinship and sympathy for these revolutionaries fighting despotic oppressors. In some ways, revolutionary crises and panoramic exhibitions were an ideal match, the emotionally stirring panorama an excellent way to channel and heighten the sympathy, sorrow, and pride antebellum Americans experienced when news of those events reached the United States.

## **The *Panorama of Athens* and the Greek War of Independence**

“A Beautiful View of What was Once the City of the Muses”<sup>299</sup>

The American exhibition of the circular *Panorama of Athens* was achieved thanks to the efforts of six men: one Italian, three English, and two Americans. English antiquarian Edward Dodwell travelled throughout Greece from 1801-1806 with Italian artist Simone Pomardi, where they used a camera obscura to take nearly 1000 views of the Grecian landscape. Their drawings became the basis of several illustrative publications, and also the inspiration for Englishmen Henry Aston Barker and Robert Burford’s twenty-five-foot-tall, one hundred and sixty-foot-long *Panorama of Athens*. Barker and Burford exhibited their creation in their London panorama building for most of 1818, after which it was purchased by Bostonian Theodore Lyman, Jr. Fresh from an extended trip through Greece with fellow Harvard alumnus Edward Everett, Lyman was so flushed with enthusiasm that he reportedly paid \$2000 to purchase the panorama and send the enormous canvas to America.<sup>300</sup>

Several surviving visual sources help reconstruct the appearance of the panorama, which was exhibited in Boston and New York before perishing in a Cambridge, Massachusetts fire in June 1845. A full schematic engraving survives, tipped into five of the six published additions of the panorama’s descriptive pamphlet. It provides an overall impression of the great painting’s estimated 4000 square feet of

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<sup>299</sup> Edward Everett journal entry, March 23, 1818, Edward Everett travel journals, [1814-1819], Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter MHS).

<sup>300</sup> R.A. McNeal, “Athens and Nineteenth-Century Panoramic Art,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 1, no. 3 (Winter 1995), 81-84. This section is greatly influenced by R.A. McNeal’s visual analysis of the panorama.

scenery.<sup>301</sup> The original painting's uninterrupted round surface in the engraving was separated into two stacked lengths that would have originally totally surrounded the viewer. (figure 4.3)

The panorama positioned its spectator on Museum Hill, an elevated point on the Attic plain whose rough terrain and vegetation dominated the immediate foreground of the painting. This perspective places the viewer among the only figures in the scene, the charming "Greeks and Albanians," shepherds, travelers, and revelers, who populate the hill. When facing southeast, the Athenian Acropolis rises in the distance, facing northwest the Monument of Philopappus dominates. Although purportedly meant to depict Athens "as it now is," the city itself is just one minor element of the larger and loaded picturesque composition that enforces a very rigid visual interpretation upon the landscape. It is nearly empty, not truly an Athens as it "now was" but a nostalgic view that reveres the remnants of antiquity and erases most

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<sup>301</sup> Research at the Houghton Library at Harvard, the Harvard University Archives, and the American Antiquarian Society indicates that there were six individual editions of the Athens pamphlet. The first was published during the panorama's original exhibition in London. At least two separate runs were published in Boston when the canvas was exhibited there in the fall 1821 (distinguished by a reduction in price, from 12 ½ cents to 6 ¼ cents). John Vanderlyn published his own pamphlet in New York, without a schematic key in it, during his 1825-1826 exhibition of the panorama. When the *panorama of Athens* was exhibited by showman David Wright in Boston in 1837, another addition was published. The final version was printed when the panorama was finally exhibited in a building on Harvard's Cambridge campus, though sadly only from 1842 to when the building (and the painting) were destroyed by fire in 1845. Vanderlyn's 1825 pamphlet and the 1837 pamphlet are distinct from the others, with descriptive text bolstered by the addition of selections from Hobhouse's travel narrative. Vanderlyn likely decided to add this in, and for want of a copy of the original pamphlet, in 1837 Wright followed Vanderlyn's example.

visual clues that might reference the multicultural modern world that surrounded the ancient Acropolis.<sup>302</sup>

While comprehensive, the engraving is uneven, some areas barely outlined while others were heavily retouched on the printing plate, giving only hints about where buildings meet valley, mountain, or water. However, several other contemporary representations of the “city of the Muses” and its surrounding landscape give a better idea of how the panorama may have looked in full detail and color, and also reinforce how constructed the view was. For example, the original drawings by Dodwell and Pomardi, from which the panoramic exhibition was based, feature the nuanced landscape.<sup>303</sup> The Acropolis, at the top left of the schematic engraving and recognizable by the familiar shape of the Parthenon, explodes into detail in Dodwell and Pomardi’s finished and published sketches. (figure 4.4) The landscape to the right of the city bursts into life in Dodwell’s “Pass of Thermopylae.” (figure 4.5) Finally, the modern, cosmopolitan city of nineteenth-century Athens, barely visible around the Acropolis in the panorama, is prominently featured in contemporary sources like Selina Bracebridge’s 1839 *Notes descriptive of a panoramic sketch of Athens* and Ferdinand Stademann’s 1841 German *Panorama von Athen*. (figures 4.6 and 4.7)

Barker and Burford’s *Panorama of Athens*, through its grandeur and imposed remove, constructs a picturesque nostalgia, overlaying Athens “as it is now” with a melancholy longing for the grandeur of what was, ancient Athens. This almost sterile, nostalgic and picturesque view has been interpreted by Classicist R.A. McNeal as

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<sup>302</sup> McNeal, 84.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

apolitical, the artist's idealized landscape lamenting the decline of past greatness but entailing "a certain disengagement from the present...notable for [its] overt apolitical content."<sup>304</sup> While the artists may not have been aiming to make an obvious political statement, throughout the span of its international exhibitions, from 1818 to 1845, the *Panorama of Athens* existed in a highly political public arena where the artist's intentions mattered little to the showmen or viewers confronted with the enormous painting. If the artists never intended the panorama to be a political statement, it was nevertheless overlaid with several as the circumstances of the Greeks changed dramatically throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

"For the Gratification & Instruction of the Students of the University"<sup>305</sup>

Despite how frequently the panoramic arts were touted as both entertainment attraction and educational tool, only one canvas exhibited in the United States before 1850 was acquired specifically for the advancement of higher learning: Harvard College's *Panorama of Athens*. First exhibited in London in 1818, by May 1820, the painting was being unloaded from the London Packet in Boston.<sup>306</sup> If contemporary

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>305</sup> Edward Everett to the Corporation, 13 February, 1823, Harvard College Papers, 1st series, 1636-1825, 1831, UAI 5.100, Harvard University Archives (hereafter Harvard College Papers, 1<sup>st</sup> series, HUA).

<sup>306</sup> Advertisements for the panorama appeared in the London Times from at least March to November 1818. Announcements of its arrival in the United States appeared first in several Boston newspapers. They read "We are happy to learn that the celebrated Panorama of Athens, which was minutely described in our paper, last Autumn, and which has been with such distinguished liberality presented to the University of Cambridge, by Col. Theodore Lyman, has arrived in the London Packet, and will be exhibited for the gratification of the public, as soon as arrangements can be made for that purpose." *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 11, 1820.

accounts are to be believed, Harvard pulled off quite the heist, snatching the panorama from “the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford [who had] made great efforts to acquire it.”<sup>307</sup>

The panorama was an unsolicited but welcome gift from University alumnus Theodore Lyman, Jr., who had purchased it in London in order to donate it to Harvard as an “expression of his regard to his alma mater.”<sup>308</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this kind of gift to the University was not uncommon, although the panorama was perhaps the largest single item to be donated. Following the burning of Harvard Hall, the college’s center of operations, in 1764, the University’s five thousand book library, collection of scientific instruments, small collection of portraits, and “natural and artificial curiosities” were lost. Immediately following this tragedy, the University’s governing Corporation informed alumni and those “who wish well to America,” domestically and abroad, about Harvard’s urgent need to replace those teaching tools. The plea was a success. In just two years, individuals from across the globe answered the call, beginning a stream of donations that continued for the next five decades and formed the basis of Harvard’s Philosophy Chamber, “the college’s primary laboratory, lecture hall, and convening space.”<sup>309</sup> While donated items like astronomical models and microscopes were meant to serve the study of natural philosophy, a core part of the College curriculum since the early

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<sup>307</sup> “Panorama of Athens,” *Nashville Whig*, December 8, 1819.

<sup>308</sup> Corporation records: minutes, 1643-1933, November 6, 1819, UAI 5.30, Harvard University Archives.

<sup>309</sup> Ethan Lasser, ed. *The Philosophy Chamber: Art and Science in Harvard’s Teaching Cabinet, 1766-1820* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museums, 2017), xvii.

eighteenth century, the panorama was intended as a learning tool for the expanding study of the Classics at Harvard.

Lyman gifted the panorama to Harvard, but he undoubtedly did so at the encouragement of his friend, Edward Everett. Throughout his life a pastor, professor, politician, and popular orator, in 1812 Everett had just been named Harvard's first professor of Greek literature. Before assuming his professorship, Everett was granted a multi-year sabbatical to pursue advanced studies in Europe. His studies took him across the European continent, where he eventually became the first American to earn a PhD from the University of Gottingen. During this period Everett also looked to Europe's leading universities for guidance on how to improve Harvard's curriculum.<sup>310</sup>

What this entailed for the instruction of the Classics at Harvard, Everett explained in a letter to Harvard University's President, John Thornton Kirkland, on

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<sup>310</sup> For more information on Everett's life and career, see: Richard A. Katula, *The Eloquence of Edward Everett: America's Greatest Orator* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010); Matthew Mason, *A Political Biography of Edward Everett* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). Everett was very impressed with the German educational system. On September 17, 1815, Everett wrote to Harvard University President John Thornton Kirkland, "there is a hope of learning, in all its departments, & particularly in classical literature...Germany is beyond all description. My conception I could almost think they had found out the royal high way to learning. We have been [bound] to hear chiefly of the stories of theological learning in Germany but every other department has been cultivated with equal zeal. Classical & Oriental literature, History, Antiquities, modern language. All the branches of natural & [---] Science have been pursued." His correspondence with his mentor and friend John Thornton Kirkland, at the time President of Harvard, preserved in his letter book from 1815-1818, show that Everett visited several Universities throughout his European travels and reported back to Kirkland on their curriculum. Edward Everett letter book and journal [photocopies], 1815-1842, MHS (hereafter Everett letter book and journal).



September 17, 1815. Writing from Gottingen, he pointed out that “the branch of antiquities is much cultivated here [and] closely connected with the illustration of the classical and the formation of a correct taste and liberal spirit in their perusal. The study of antiquities cannot be pursued to great advantage without sensible apparatus.” Although Everett readily conceded that purchasing original artworks would be too expensive, he advocated for alternatives such as plaster casts to assist students “in forming the magic” of the classics in their minds. He argued that for students studying the likes of Virgil and Homer, “the efforts of Grecian art” would help fully illustrate those ancient teachings and render their lessons more distinctly. Although perhaps not an acquisition he originally anticipated, Barker and Burford’s *Panorama of Athens* ideally suited Everett’s goals for improving the teaching of classical literature at Harvard.<sup>311</sup>

Everett had in fact visited the *Panorama of Athens* in March 1818. His detailed description of the panorama and his emotional reaction to it speaks to the overwhelming nature of the exhibition for him. When it opened in London, just days after he arrived in the city to begin a tour of the British Isles and its Universities, he recorded in his diary that the panorama was “most admirably done and gives one an idea of the present condition of the city.” He further explained that “one cannot but be affected with grief, beholding so plainly the work of time and barbarism, seeing the

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<sup>311</sup> Edward Everett to John Thornton Kirkland, September 17, 1815, Everett letter book and journal, MHS.

vacant spots where temples stood, the columns so thus built into pile walls, and of others standing alone amidst the Ruins of the Roofs they once supported.”<sup>312</sup>

During this visit, Everett was already contemplating the panoramas’ potential value and future at Harvard. He lamented the grim future of the panorama, writing that “these beautiful panoramas meet with a melancholy fate. After being shown a while, the Canvas is so dark that they are painted over again... This beautiful view of what was once the city of the Muses will before long be changed into a battle or a pretty landscape, and the painter will paint out the Ruins of the Parthenon, with as little remorse as Lord Elgin bore them down.”<sup>313</sup> Everett must have asked a gallery attendant what happened to the canvases after their exhibitions ended, and learning that the *Panorama of Athens* was destined to be recycled for the next exhibition, began devising an alternative plan for it.

Everett’s conviction in the accuracy and beauty of the panorama’s representation of Athens was cemented following his two-month trip through Greece, accompanied by Theodore Lyman Jr., in April and May 1819. They took an extensive tour of the country, making stops at Delphi, Thebes, Corinth, Argos, Sparta, and Athens. Despite being impressed by the Acropolis and the barren, sparse appearance of the surrounding countryside, Everett’s recollections of Athens were tempered by what he had already read about the city: “it is in vain to describe what has been so

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<sup>312</sup> Edward Everett journal entry, March 23, 1818, Edward Everett Papers, Ms. N-1201, MHS.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

often described as the ruins of Athens...I found things as the descriptions and views led me to expect.”<sup>314</sup>

“For want of the funds for a suitable building”<sup>315</sup>

Despite the potential utility of the panorama to support the teaching of the Classics at Harvard, upon the canvas’s arrival in Boston, the College struggled to make suitable arrangements for its exhibition at Cambridge. In 1820, Harvard was already committed to several construction projects, including the expansion of dormitories, construction of lecture rooms “for chemical and anatomical apparatus and theatres” and, most ambitiously, expanding its library.<sup>316</sup> As a result of that ongoing work, the University Corporation did not believe it “prudent or proper...at the present moment to erect, at the expense of the Institution, an edifice for the exhibition of the said Panorama.”<sup>317</sup>

After consulting with local theatrical scene painter and sometime panorama exhibitor John Worrall, Harvard’s President, John Thornton Kirkland, knew that an appropriate building for the panorama would be costly. Worrall estimated that a “suitable edifice” would cost perhaps \$1000, but in order to “prevent disappointment,” warned it could very well cost twice that. An additional estimate received in 1822

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<sup>314</sup> Edward Everett, journal of Italy, Greece, and Constantinople, March 21 to July 2, 1819, Everett Papers, MHS.

<sup>315</sup> “The Panorama of Athens,” *The Boston Courier*, August 24, 1843.

<sup>316</sup> Lasser, ed., *Philosophy Chamber*, 38.

<sup>317</sup> John Thornton Kirkland and John Lowell to the Corporation, June 3, 1820, College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

indicated that for \$1150, a panorama building could be built with a “trench 2 feet deep of rough stone [and one foot of brick]...the walls to be sheath’d [sic] with good board plastered; roof shingled...[and the] curb on top to be composition.”<sup>318</sup> Although that estimate also included two coats of paint, it did not include additional ornaments for the building such as a portico nor any interior fittings or furnishings.

The College corporation also consulted with John Chamberlain, Harvard’s Carpenter. Although he was working on the library expansion, Chamberlain provided a design for a panorama building and estimate for its potential cost. His estimate, just \$342, only included the cost of materials for the building he imagined, and while he proposed a sturdy building, it was not ideal for displaying the panorama. At twenty-five feet square and ten feet high and with a wooden board roof covered with composition, Chamberlain’s building would not have properly accommodated the twenty-five-foot-tall *Panorama of Athens*, nor provided the necessary natural light from above. As a result, Chamberlain’s proposal was not utilized and the College instead focused their energy on raising funds to match the costlier proposals.<sup>319</sup>

An attempt was first made to raise money by subscription, appealing again to patrons and supporters of the University for contributions to the project. Early on, at least two individuals agreed to contribute the hefty \$200 pledge requested for the panorama building. However, as evidenced by the measured and hesitant response of Boston physician and Harvard Medical College Professor Dr. Walter Channing, many

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<sup>318</sup> “Estimate for a Building to contain a Panorama,” about 1822, College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

<sup>319</sup> An estimate for building an edifice, [1822?], College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

others were hesitant to contribute to a project with so many unknown variables.<sup>320</sup> He wrote to Kirkland that he felt “incompetent to form an opinion, whether the plan suggested, is the most eligible,” and as such, declined to add his name to the subscriber’s list.<sup>321</sup> Furthermore, he suggested that he thought it would be best to leave the panorama under the management of the University, rather than a group of subscribers to whom the painting would then be beholden.

As a result, Lyman and Everett began making plans for the panorama to support itself. The idea to exhibit the panorama in “the great cities of the United States” had been proposed soon after its arrival in Boston, so that its proceeds could be used to fund the construction of a permanent building. However, President Kirkland initially believed that plan to be unsuitable “to the dignity of the institution,” and that touring the painting would cause it “irreparable injury.”<sup>322</sup> However, in March 1821, Lyman presented the idea of exhibiting the panorama, for a short period, at a new building constructed for John Roulstone’s Circus, on Mason Street in Boston. Lyman was likely able to barter this agreement because he was one of the six dozen prominent Bostonians who had purchased shares in the Circus. The exhibition opened in late August for a little over a month, and after some convincing, Roulstone agreed that the full receipts of its exhibition would be donated to Harvard.

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<sup>320</sup> Walter Channing (1786-1876) Papers, Ms. N-2123.3, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>321</sup> “Subscribers to the Panorama,” 1 June 1820; Dr. Walter Channing to John Thornton Kirkland, 7 June, 1820, College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

<sup>322</sup> John Thornton Kirkland and John Lowell to the Corporation, June 3, 1820, College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

There was some contention over this decision. Henry Gasset, a Boston merchant and the treasurer of the “Proprietors of the Circus,” initially refused to comply with the request, posed on behalf of the University by Judge John Davis, that the Circus not require Harvard to pay the rent owed for using the space to exhibit the panorama in addition to handing over the receipts. This dispute eventually forced a vote among the Circus proprietors, who agreed “to relinquish to Harvard College our proportion of the Rent and Profits accruing from the exhibition of the Panorama of Athens.” The vote was nearly unanimous, with only three people voting no. A report in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* on the panorama exhibition estimated that about \$100 had been taken each week when Athens was open at Roulstone’s Circus, but it is uncertain if the University ever received that full amount.<sup>323</sup>

In 1823, the University apparently questioned Roulstone again regarding whether he had turned over the promised money. As one of the voting proprietors of the Circus, Roulstone had voted yes with the majority. That was a decision that may have appealed to his philanthropic spirit but likely not his business sense. The agreement chiefly benefited Harvard, supporting their goal of creating a permanent exhibition space for the panorama but leaving Roulstone responsible for paying ground rent, installation, and staffing expenses without the return of profits to cover his debts. When asked about the dispersal of the money, Roulstone evaded giving a direct answer and instead wrote that he had not demanded payment for his services,

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<sup>323</sup> Henry Gasset to John Davis, 3 November, 1821; “We the Proprietors of the Circus,” undated, College Papers, 1st series, HUA. “The Panorama of Athens,” *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 13, 1821.

rent, or compensation for the delay he experienced in occupying the Circus building with his own business.<sup>324</sup>

Finally, in an effort to bolster proceeds during the panorama's exhibition and further promote it, Everett, by then acting Professor of Greek Literature at Harvard and a respected and popular orator, agreed to give a lecture on Athens, the proceeds from ticket sales benefiting the panorama. Announcements in local newspapers encouraged those planning to attend the lecture on September 26 "to take with them the *Atlas to Anacharsis*, or such other Maps and Views of Greece which refer to the subject of the lecture."<sup>325</sup> At least one attendee had certainly visited the panorama earlier that month, since he took the souvenir descriptive pamphlet published for the exhibition to the lecture. The pamphlet is annotated with the date of the lecture on the front page and notes from Everett's talk, providing some hints about what he discussed that afternoon. Among other topics, Everett discussed Aeschylus, the father of Greek tragedy, Grecian architecture and the Greek orders (Ionic, Doric, Corinthian), and debated the original construction of the Parthenon and its roof.<sup>326</sup>

The lecture was a surprising success. Prior to the event, Everett had privately expressed his concern that the exhibition needed to raise at least one hundred dollars, but his fears were unfounded.<sup>327</sup> The lecture raised three hundred and twenty dollars

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<sup>324</sup> John Davis to the Honorable Mr. Welles, 5 May, 1823, College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

<sup>325</sup> *Columbian Centinel*, September 26, 1821.

<sup>326</sup> *Description of the view of Athens and surrounding country*, (Boston: ---, 1821), MHS.

<sup>327</sup> Edward Everett to John Lowell[?], College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

that went straight to the panorama building fund. In the wake of this success, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* announced that the funds raised between the exhibition and the lecture were “sufficient to authorize the commencement of a suitable edifice at Cambridge, where it can be displayed in such a manner, as to constitute a very attractive and appropriate ornament to the University.”<sup>328</sup> The records kept by the Treasurer of the Harvard Corporation show that \$639.33 were deposited in the Hospital Life Insurance Company specifically earmarked for the panorama. However, that was not enough to meet the minimum \$1000 needed. As a result, the panorama project was temporarily shelved.<sup>329</sup> The panorama would not be exhibited again for four years, by which time the public conversations around Greece had substantially shifted.

“The people...are very zealous in the cause of the Greeks”<sup>330</sup>

In March 1821, after nearly 400 years of Turkish rule, Greek military commander Alexander Ypsilantis led a force of 4500 soldiers into the Greek province of Moldavia. Although his efforts were quickly defeated, his revolt

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<sup>328</sup> “The Panorama of Athens,” *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 13, 1821.

<sup>329</sup> This shelving frustrated Everett, who, in February 1823, wrote a lengthy letter to the Harvard Corporation pleading that they once again turn their attention to the panorama and its permanent settlement. He wrote that “a year and a half has since lapsed and nothing, that I know of, has been done towards erecting the edifice. The public expectation is, in some degree, disappointed. Those who labored in the cause will perhaps think they labored for naught.” Edward Everett to the Harvard Corporation, 13 February, 1823, College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

<sup>330</sup> James T. Blanchard to Harriet Blanchard, 27 February, 1824, Letters to Benjamin Seaver, 1824-1854, Ms. N-2319, MHS.



sparked uprisings throughout most of Greece. This conflict, known as the Greek Revolution or the Greek War of Independence, continued for the rest of the decade. Land and naval battles between the Greeks and the Turks were impacted by internal strife among the Greek revolutionaries. Although foreign interest and sympathy were steady in support of the Greeks throughout this period, direct military intervention by England, France, and Russia on their behalf was mobilized only in 1828, the revolution's final year of armed conflict.<sup>331</sup>

News of this nationalist "Greek Insurrection" reached the United States in late May 1821. Through the influence of American philhellenes and steady reporting of unfolding events in Greece by American newspapers, news of the Greek War of Independence reached the American public swiftly. Edward Everett, considered the premiere "American Hellenist" of his age due to his position at Harvard and his early travels in Greece, was a direct source of information on the revolution, using his position as editor of the *North American Review* to arouse public sentiment and raise awareness for the plight of the Greeks. He published the "Messenian Address" sent by the Senate in Kalamata, the capital of that southern Greek province, where they appealed directly to the "just, humane, and generous" American people for aid in

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<sup>331</sup> Edward Mead Earle, "American Interest in the Greek Cause, 1821-1827," *The American Historical Review* 33, no. 1 (October 1927): 44-63; Stephan A. Larrabee, *Hellas Observed: The American Experience of Greece, 1775-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 1957); Paul Constantine Pappas, *The United States and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Angelo Repousis, "'The Cause of the Greeks': Philadelphia and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123, no. 4 (October 1999): 333-363.

purging Greece “from the Barbarians, who for four hundred years have polluted the soil.”<sup>332</sup>

The reverence for Greece held by classically educated elite men like Everett may not have resonated with all Americans, but other contributing factors made the Greek Revolution a subject of unprecedented public interest throughout the 1820s.<sup>333</sup> Burgeoning national pride played a role, including knowledge that the example of their own revolution was fueling the dissemination of republican ideology around the world. Some Americans felt an emotional kinship with the revolutionary Greeks, a connection forged in recognizing their own efforts to rise from tyranny in this new generation of resistance. Additionally, the Greek struggle was also a religious one; the Greeks were fellow Christians engaged in a political and ideological war against their Muslim oppressors.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Earle, 47; Pappas, 28. The Messenian State Address was sent first to Albert Gallatin, United States Minister to France, who forwarded its Greek text along with a French translation to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in September 1821. A few months later a copy was forwarded to Edward Everett, who publicized the text in America. American newspapers picked up the Address, along with other positive and moving notices from Greece, like Ypsilantis’s stirring call to arms to his fellow valiant Greeks. “Let us arm ourselves without delay with our ancient valor, and I promise, in a short time, victory, and with it every happiness...Let us do this or perish. To arms then my friends, your country calls you.” “Greek Insurrection. To arms, for our Country and our Religion!,” *Washington Gazette*, May 24, 1821.

<sup>333</sup> Since Edward Mead Earle wrote his *American Historical Review* article in the late 1920s, scholars have noted that even though Americans had witnessed the outbreak of revolutionary struggles before the outbreak of the Greek Revolution, in France, South America, and even among the Serbians against the Turks in the early nineteenth century, it was only the Greeks that elicited widespread humanitarian assistance from the United States.

<sup>334</sup> Repousis, 333-334; Earle, 44-45.

The Greeks' calls for American support and aid did not go unanswered. However, because of the Monroe Administration's increasing commitment to American neutrality in international affairs in the early 1820s, America's humanitarian efforts in support of the Greeks were largely run from the bottom up, by private citizens. Although cities like Charleston, South Carolina and Springfield, Massachusetts sent provisions to Greece as early as 1821, it was not until 1823, after President Munroe's State of the Union Address where what became known as the "Munroe Doctrine" was announced, that "Greek fever" spread within American cities.<sup>335</sup> Pro-Greek relief committees were organized in America's major cities, including New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore, their main goal to "solicit donations for the relief of the Greeks." These efforts generated substantial financial support for the Greeks, amounting to about \$40,000 by the end of 1824. This swell of popular aid efforts was described as a "Greek mania," and it even spread west and south. From New Orleans, where he was visiting on business, Boston merchant James T. Blanchard wrote to his aunt that "the people of [New] Orleans, like those of other cities in the Union, are very zealous in the cause of the Greeks. We have had orations and contributions in abundance."<sup>336</sup>

That mania manifested not only in orations and the call for private donations, but infiltrated popular culture, keeping the Greek's struggles before the public and providing them several opportunities to continue donating to the Greek cause. In 1822, New York City's Park Street Theatre commissioned and performed a new play titled

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<sup>335</sup> Pappas, 32.

<sup>336</sup> James T. Blanchard to Harriet Blanchard, 27 February, 1824, Letters to Benjamin Seaver, 1824-1854, Ms. N-2319, MHS.

*The Grecian Captive; or the Fall of Athens*. The local press wrote that “it was not surprising that the events occurring in Greece should form materials for a Drama. No country is more fruitful in incident, and the mingling of Turkish and Grecian manners, habits, and costumes, cannot fail to present a lively picture.” Particular praise was given to the correct and elegant scene of Athens painted for the performance, which showed “a striking view of the Acropolis, together with the ruins of the Parthenon.”<sup>337</sup> And while it does not seem that the Park Theater contributed any proceeds from their *Grecian Captive* performances to the Greek cause, numerous other amusements did. The *Salem Gazette* in 1821 made light of this phenomenon, writing that “the recent appeal from the Greeks has excited, throughout the country, a very lively interest. In all the principal cities, measures have been taken to assist them in their struggles. Young men and maidens, old bachelors, museums, puppet shows, theatres, circuses, &c. have had their turning in *benefiting* them.”<sup>338</sup> It is into this atmosphere that the *Panorama of Athens* reemerged for public exhibition after a four-year absence, in July 1825.

#### “Athens, As It Is Now”

In the summer 1825, Harvard’s President Kirkland visited the Panorama Rotunda in New York. Opened in 1818 by enterprising American-born, European-

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<sup>337</sup> “The Drama,” *Minerva* (NY), June 15, 1822. A transcript of the play was also produced and provided to members of the audience in the boxes and pit. Several surviving copies can be found in archival collections, including at the Houghton Library at Harvard and the American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>338</sup> “The Greeks,” *Salem Gazette*, December 23, 1821. Newspaper searches reveal advertisements through 1828 for fancy dress balls, bachelor’s balls, lotteries, concerts, plays and fairs, all “for the benefit of the Greeks.”

trained artist John Vanderlyn, the Rotunda was intended for the permanent exhibition of circular panoramas. During that visit, Kirkland likely viewed Vanderlyn's own *Panorama of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles*, recently returned from exhibition in Washington D.C. and spoke with Vanderlyn himself, probably questioning him about the exhibition space and its cost. The following April, Vanderlyn seized on this new acquaintance and wrote to Kirkland, requesting permission to borrow and exhibit Harvard's *Panorama of Athens*. "The proper season is now at hand, and I have no doubts that such an exhibition will meet with liberal patronage from the public." The University Corporation voted and consented, shipping the boxed panorama to New York via the Sloop "Hero" in early June.<sup>339</sup> (figure 4.8)

It took about a month to prepare the panorama for exhibition. During this time, Vanderlyn's employees paid for advertising in three local newspapers, and printed and distributed 1200 bills announcing the new attraction at the Rotunda. The twenty-five-foot-tall canvas was so cumbersome that a carpenter was brought in to actually hang the picture, while over forty dollars had to be paid "for repairs in painting done to the picture in the breaks of the canvas," perhaps caused by several years neglect in storage and the passage to New York.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> John Vanderlyn to John Thornton Kirkland, April 4, 1825, John Vanderlyn to Josiah Quincy, June 9, 1835, College Papers, 1st series, 1636-1825, HUA; "Application of [John] Vanderlyn for the Panorama," "Committee [authorized to dispose of it], May 2, 1825, Corporation records: minutes, 1643-1989, HUA. Vanderlyn negotiated well for the privilege of exhibiting the panorama. He did not pay a rental fee and successfully petitioned to "divide equally the net proceeds from the exhibition – as I consider the building or place of exhibition equivalent to the picture."

<sup>340</sup> "Charges & expenditures on the panorama of Athens," June-July 1825, John Vanderlyn papers, [ca. 1796-1890], microfilm reel 1040, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter Vanderlyn Papers, AAA). This was not the only

The exhibition of “Athens, as it is now” opened at the New York Rotunda in July 1825, but was plagued with difficulties, at least, according to Vanderlyn. He had reassured Harvard’s Corporation that the circumference and height of the Rotunda would accommodate Athens perfectly, “without cutting or doubling it, the floor being made so as to be lowered to the height of the picture exhibited.”<sup>341</sup> However, it seems the canvas nevertheless had to be folded down at the top for the Rotunda to fit its twenty five foot height, causing damage that later required retouching.<sup>342</sup> Furthermore, Vanderlyn privately complained that the picture had been “sent on too late in the season to meet the success which it probably would have had [if] ready for exhibition in May. Now the cool weather coming on I trust it will do better, aided by a little newspaper puffing.”<sup>343</sup>

And indeed, surviving business records paint a mixed picture of the *Panorama of Athens*’ initial reception in New York City. Receipts for the first sixty-eight days of the Athens exhibition in New York, from July 1 to September 17, indicate that the picture took in about \$468.63, primarily in twenty-five cent individual ticket sales but also some \$1 season ticket purchases. Unsurprisingly, its highest grossing day was the

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instance of Vanderlyn paying for the in-painting of a panorama canvas. Philadelphia advertisements for Henry A. Barker’s *Panorama of the City of Paris*, exhibited in September 1819 after a season spent at Vanderlyn’s Rotunda, curiously boast that “the Panorama of the City of Paris has been almost repainted under the direction of one of the best artists in New York.” “Panorama of the City of Paris,” *Franklin Gazette* (NY), September 29, 1819.

<sup>341</sup> J. Vanderlyn to J.T. Kirkland, 20 May, 1825, College Papers, 1st series, HUA.

<sup>342</sup> Edward Everett to John Quincy, 11 May 1837, College Papers, 2nd series, HUA

<sup>343</sup> Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 9 September 1825, Vanderlyn Papers, AAA.

Fourth of July, when nearly 200 people visited, bringing in \$48 dollars that single day. However, beyond that anomaly, daily receipts rarely totaled more than ten dollars. The *Panorama of Athens* in the summer of 1825 then was slightly less profitable than Vanderlyn's own *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* had been six years earlier during the same season, when its receipts had totaled \$520.73. These receipts for Athens also do not indicate its actual profits since Vanderlyn had also accrued over one hundred dollars in expenses and was obligated to split the proceeds with Harvard College to meet the terms of their agreement.<sup>344</sup>

“The Fires of Grecian Liberty Extinguished Forever”<sup>345</sup>

Despite this unpromising start, the *Panorama of Athens* remained on view in New York through at least October 1826, during which time foreign news about the ongoing Greek War was increasingly contradictory and alarming. Reports arriving from England and other European countries were not always consistent and the desired good news of Greek victories was overshadowed by unfavorable news of growing Turkish and Egyptian forces successfully advancing on the Greek forces. In fact, this period through the spring 1827, was one of the lowest points of the Greek War of Independence; the prospect of success looked increasingly like a lost cause.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> “Receipts for Exhibition of Picture of Athens,” July 1 to October 1, 1825, “Receipts of Palace & Garden of Versailles, from June 29<sup>th</sup> 1819 to September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1819,” Vanderlyn Papers, AAA.

<sup>345</sup> “Rotunda,” *New York Commercial Advertiser*, October 9, 1826.

<sup>346</sup> Repousis, 351; James W. Trent, *The Manliest Man: Samuel G. Howe and the Contours of Nineteenth-Century American Reform* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 37.

The most distressing news, however, which transformed the American public's interpretation of the *Panorama of Athens*' visual narrative, came in early fall 1826, when foreign reports confirmed that Turkish forces had arrived outside Athens itself.

In May 1826, word reached the United States that Missolonghi, a Greek city on the western coast of the central Greek region then referred to as the Morea, had finally fallen to the combined Turkish and Egyptian forces, who had been laying siege to the city for eighteen months. The length of Missolonghi's resistance had created a false sense of security regarding the impregnability of the town, so word of its fall elicited genuine horror among those who supported the Greek cause.<sup>347</sup> Even more disconcerting was the news that with the Greek stronghold of Missolonghi now under Turkish control, the Turkish forces were left largely "without opposition" and had begun marching east into Attica towards Athens.<sup>348</sup> With the enemy's forces advancing, the Greeks under the command of General Yannis Gouras attempted to fortify the city. However, by late August news was already circulating in American newspapers that the Greeks had been forced to abandon the modern city of Athens and take up a final defensive position within the fortified walls of the Acropolis.<sup>349</sup> The siege of the Acropolis continued through the fall of 1827. For western Greek sympathizers tracking the progress of the war, the loss of Athens to the Turkish forces

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<sup>347</sup> Earle, 58-59; Trent, 36-37.

<sup>348</sup> *New York Spectator*, August 22, 1826.

<sup>349</sup> William St. Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2008), 317; *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser* (NY), August 26, 1826.



would have been a powerful symbolic blow because the city represented the past and potential future greatness of Greece itself.<sup>350</sup>

The unfolding fate of Athens “by the latest arrivals” bled into the Panorama Rotunda’s advertisements in a way contemporary news never had before. Since the establishment opened in 1818, Vanderlyn had featured the scale and splendor of the panoramas he exhibited as their primary selling points: emphasizing the thousands of square feet of canvas on display, or reassuring visitors that his imported and domestically produced paintings were “the finest specimens of art exhibited in our country.”<sup>351</sup> (figure 4.9) While the advertisements for Athens when it first opened for exhibition in New York followed that pattern, when the “foreign news” leading into the summer 1826 began painting an increasingly bleak picture, that information became of primary interest. (figure 4.10)

The panorama’s later advertisements highlighted the uncertainty of Athens’ future:

While we are now writing, perhaps the crescent is waving in triumph over the walls of the Parthenon, the fires of Grecian liberty extinguished forever, and the venerated monuments of art which adorn this ancient capital smouldering [sic] in ruins. By the latest arrivals it appears that General Gouras hath [sic] thrown himself into the citadel, which he was determined to defend to the last extremity.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Trent, 38.

<sup>351</sup> See in particular the advertisements for the *Panorama of Paris* in 1818, Vanderlyn’s own *Panorama of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* in 1819, and the panorama painting of the Battle of Waterloo in 1820. *Mercantile Advertiser*, October 1, 1818; “Communication,” *National Advocate* (NY), June 8, 1819; *The New-York Columbian*, October 11, 1820.

<sup>352</sup> “Greece,” *New York National Advocate*, August 21, 1826.

The long delay caused by the months needed for news to cross the Atlantic in the advertisement adds a sense of hopelessness. Visitors to the panorama like the individual who wrote to the *New York Commercial Advertiser*'s editor in October 1825 may well have been compelled, as they looked out over the painted Attic plain, to "utter a heart-felt prayer, that Providence would smile upon the efforts of the modern Greeks." That summer, those prayers may well have been fruitless, Athens already lost even as the panorama's visitors stared out over its countryside.<sup>353</sup>

A sense of the macabre infiltrated the panorama hall, the painting becoming a memorial to the war and of "augmented interest" to the Americans viewing the canvas through new eyes. The viewer's perspective over the scene, from the elevated position of Museum Hill, took on a sinister quality, since it was likely serving as the "point of attack for the besieging army," or used "to screen the Turkish encampment from the cannon of the Acropolis."<sup>354</sup> A writer for the *New York Daily Advertiser* lamented the irony that the *Panorama of Athens* provided such an accurate representation of the "localities of Athens, the Parthenon, the tomb of Philopappus, the temples of Jupiter, Olympus, and of Theseus," ruins now "doomed to be blotted from the face of the earth," just as visitors to the Rotunda had become familiar with them.<sup>355</sup> Even the interpretation of the figures populating Museum Hill evolved. Always described in the panorama's souvenir pamphlet as "a groupe [sic] of Greeks and Albanians," during the siege of the Acropolis at least one visitor to the panorama saw them instead as a group

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<sup>353</sup> "For the Commercial Advertiser," *New-York Spectator*, October 11, 1825.

<sup>354</sup> *New York National Advocate*, August 21, 1826.

<sup>355</sup> *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser* (NY), August 26, 1826.

of potentially dangerous “turban’d Turks” standing near “some dark-eyed maidens of Greece,” their innocence and vulnerability embodied through their dancing. The unfortunate presumed fate of these figures was elaborated in the narratives of “Turkish barbarities” against Greek women and children that circulated widely in the United States in the late 1820s.<sup>356</sup>

Without surviving receipts, it is difficult to say with certainty if the American public’s heightened sympathies for Greece and their fear of the seemingly imminent “total destruction of [its] splendid edifices” drew people back to the Rotunda.<sup>357</sup>

However, the panorama’s transformation into a memorial to the “fires of Grecian liberty extinguished forever” did coincide with the second wave of American relief and aid to Greece, revived by the American Greek committees in late 1826 and into 1827. Although originally an empty, picturesque landscape that captured the splendor of western classical tradition, when viewed in the midst of the unfolding events of the

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<sup>356</sup> See for example, *Turkish Barbarity: An Affecting Narrative of the Unparalleled sufferings of Mrs. Sophia Mazro, a Greek Lady of Missolonghi* (Providence: Printed for G.C. Jennings, 1828), John Hay Library, Brown University.

<sup>357</sup> Vanderlyn did not advertise consistently and in the second half of the 1820s was beginning to exhibit his panoramas in cities beyond New York. While Athens may have gone back to Boston at the end of October, (when the original advertisements for it in New York end), it may have sat in the Rotunda building for some months afterward and been opened for private showings to interested parties, as Vanderlyn did sometimes do, which would explain why the New York papers were still writing about the panorama in December. An article in the December 1826 *New-York Spectator* suggested that “those who feel disposed, will find themselves amply repaid by spending an hour at the Rotunda, in this city, and studying the ground where the battle took place. That inimitable painting presents not only the city of Athens, but a view of almost the whole of Attica, and to the classical mind affords one of the richest treats of the kind ever spread upon canvas.” “Latest from Greece,” *New-York Spectator*, December 8, 1826.

Greek War for Independence, the *Panorama of Athens* was transformed into a representation of an endangered landscape, a culture, on the brink of extermination, that deserved sympathy and support.<sup>358</sup>

Upon the panorama's return to Boston, Harvard College continued struggling to find an appropriate way to exhibit it, and Athens disappeared from public display for over a decade. In 1835, Vanderlyn proposed borrowing the painting once again, to exhibit at his new southern buildings in Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia. However, Harvard's new president, Josiah Quincy, denied his request, as he did not know Vanderlyn well enough to place his trust in him.<sup>359</sup> Instead, he reached out to an independent painting and panorama exhibitor, David Wright, and allowed him to exhibit Athens in 1837.<sup>360</sup> This revival prompted Harvard's Corporation to

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<sup>358</sup> *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser* (NY), August 26, 1826; *National Advocate*, August 21, 1826. For more information on the American relief efforts in the late 1820s, see Pappas, 117-126.

<sup>359</sup> John Vanderlyn to Theodore Lyman, Jr., 12 May 1835; John Vanderlyn to Josiah Quincy, 9 June 1835; John Vanderlyn to Josiah Quincy, 17 June 1835; John Vanderlyn to Josiah Quincy, 30 June 1835; Harvard University. Corporation. Harvard College Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 1826-1863. Harvard University Archives (hereafter Harvard College Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> series).

<sup>360</sup> David Wright to Josiah Quincy, 12 December 1836; 17 July 1837; 1 August 1837; 9 August 1837; 13 August 1837; 30 August 1837; 29 September 1837; 4 October 1837; 11 October 1837, Harvard College Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> series. Although Wright arranged for the panorama to be temporarily exhibited at the Riding school at the foot of Chesnut street, he negotiated at length with President Quincy about mediating the construction of a permanent exhibition building on the Harvard College campus. Despite drawing up plans and coming to an agreement with J.F. Edwards and Co., local housewrights, President Quincy ultimately backed out of the arrangement. Wright's architectural plan for a panorama building survives in the Harvard College Papers, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, but at present the volume is too fragile to digitize.

finally make arrangements for a permanent exhibition space on their campus for the panorama, exhibiting it in an available space above the campus fire department. Ironically, it was burned and destroyed in 1845, an act of arson strongly suspected.<sup>361</sup> The Greek Revolution also returned to panoramic form in the 1830s, when a peristrepthic panorama of *The Battle of Navarino* was imported from England and exhibited in the United States. Painted after the successful end of the war, this panorama highlighted the naval battle fought between the English, French, Russian, and Greek combatants against the Turks and their allies in late 1827.<sup>362</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, the Navarino panorama was triumphant in a way that the *Panorama of Athens* in the midst of the war could not be.

With its expansive horizons across the Attic plain, Harvard's circular *Panorama of Athens* experienced a significant interpretive transformation during its longest American exhibition to that point, during the darkest period of the Greek War of Independence. First appearing before American audiences as an accurate representation of the capital of classical antiquity and genesis of western civilization, the public's fascination and concern with the outcome of the Greek struggle redefined the panorama from a picture of reverence to one of remorse. And while not intentionally done, the panorama's transition into a subject of "augmented interest" during the "Greek-mania" of the 1820s set a precedent, indicating that, perhaps, events that stirred American sympathies might prove attractive subjects for future panoramic

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<sup>361</sup> Great Fire at Cambridge," *Farmer's Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), June 12, 1845.

<sup>362</sup> *Description of Sinclair's Grand Peristrepthic or Moving Panorama of the Battle of Navarino* (New York: Craighead & Allen, Prints, 1835).

displays. Following the end of the Greek War of Independence, it was the plight of the Poles that next roused America's international humanitarian interest.

### **The Polish Exiles in America and the Panoramas of their Late Revolution**

The Greek War of Independence was but one instance of revolutionary uprising in the first half of the nineteenth century. The examples of the American and French Revolutions inspired a new generation around the world, who rose to revolution throughout Latin America and Europe in waves. All were covered in American newspapers, but it was the plight of the Polish revolutionaries following their failed "November Uprising" of 1830 that next roused American sympathies into public action and attempts to provide physical relief to those in need. As with the Greek Revolution, that public interest bled into the realm of popular culture. In 1834, America's interest in "the unfortunate Poles" directly inspired panoramic productions, which sought to visualize the struggles of the Polish exiles then arriving in America. Largely forgotten except by scholars concerned with the history of Polish-Americans, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the fate of Poland and her people was in fact a common topic of discussion in the United States.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> For the sake of space and to create a clearer narrative, this final section will also focus on a single attraction. However, there was also a dioramic exhibition in Philadelphia that was created by a group of Polish exiles who had arrived in the city the summer of 1834. A surviving broadside in the Library Company of Philadelphia collection claims that the exhibition was overseen by E. Boneau de St. Marcel, a Polish exile who had been an artist in Poland before fleeing. Unfortunately, according to Mathew Carey, chairman of Philadelphia's Polish Committee, the diorama did not turn a profit, forcing St. Marcel and his companions to flee the city when debt collectors came after them to recoup the money the Poles had borrowed to put up the exhibition.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, America and Poland's fates were diametrically opposed. As the American colonies united to demand their independence from the British Empire in the 1770s, Poland's powerful neighbors united to fracture Poland's autonomy in the first of three partitions. In the 1790s, when the young United States was negotiating the shape and power of its constitution, Poland's "Constitution of the Third of May" died a quick death, its announcement in 1791 leading to Poland's Second Partition, which shrunk the country another two thirds.<sup>364</sup> Where America's own revolutionary insurrection had ended in success, Poland's "Kosciuszko Uprising" in 1794 failed, erasing any hopes for an independent republican Poland for another century. As the United States' power and position on the global map grew, Poland disappeared from the Europe, subsumed into Russia, Prussia, and Austria.<sup>365</sup>

Beginning in the 1790s, the absolute defeat and destruction of the Polish nation was deeply felt by the American public, made hyperaware of their own good fortune in having earned their liberty when the "unfortunate Poles" were oppressed once again. That awareness was heightened by the knowledge that two Polish men, Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Kazimierz Pulaski, had voluntarily joined the American army during

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<sup>364</sup> The Constitution of the Third of May proclaimed Poland a constitutional monarchy, established separate executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government, and vowed to expand the political freedoms of ordinary Poles.

<sup>365</sup> Since the 1569 unification of two nations, the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania had been the second largest state in Europe, only smaller than Russia. Politically united but culturally heterogeneous, the former Poland and Lithuania shared a common monarch but the Commonwealth was governed largely by its shared Parliament, with considerable influence from the Polish-Lithuanian aristocracy. Although it was Europe's largest republic in the late eighteenth century, the Commonwealth was weak and surrounded on all sides by powerful absolutist states, and vulnerable to their influence and interference.

the Revolutionary War and played a significant role among America's own founding fathers in defeating the British.<sup>366</sup> (figure 4.11) Sympathy for Poland was expressed in American newspapers frequently following the arrival of more bad news from abroad. For example, Minister Jedidiah Morse of Boston, in his Thanksgiving sermon of 1795, exclaimed "the miseries of the Polish nation, judging from the latest accounts from that quarter, are, at this time, great and deplorable beyond description. Unfortunate, afflicted brethren in the bonds of freedom, we weep with you!"<sup>367</sup>

This Christian sympathy and sense of kinship and shared values endeared the "Polish nation" to the American public, even if it existed only in the minds and nationalistic spirit of the Polish people and their supporters. American support is evident even in American cartography. Despite the total physical division of Poland, American atlases like *A New General Atlas*, published by James Seaman in New York

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<sup>366</sup> Tadeusz Kosciuszko, like the more readily remembered Frenchmen, the Marquis de Lafayette, came to the American colonies in 1776 to volunteer his services in support of the American cause. According to Kosciuszko's biographers, his skills as a military engineer were crucial to the progress of the war. General Horatio Gates, who appointed Kosciuszko the principal engineer of the Southern army under his command in 1779, attributed the earlier American victory at Saratoga entirely to the "young Polish engineer" who had been skillful enough to take advantage of the hills and forests around the American encampment to protect the American forces and stymie the British. Rising to the rank of brigadier general by the end of the war, Kosciuszko was privately praised by his colleagues and publically lauded as an American Revolutionary War hero. He returned to Poland in 1783. Miecislus Haiman, *Kosciuszko in the American Revolution* (New York: Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1943); James S. Pula, *Thaddeus Kosciuszko: The Purest Son of Liberty* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1998).

<sup>367</sup> *The Present Situation of other Nations of the World, contrasted with our own*. A sermon; delivered at Charlestown, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Boston: Printed by Samuel Hall, 1795), quoted in Haiman, 204.



in 1820, continued to prominently illustrate Poland on maps of Europe, illustrating the boundaries of the foreign claims but continuing to acknowledge the territory as “Poland.” (figure 4.12)

The succession of European revolutions in 1830, most notably in France and Belgium, ignited revolutionary stirrings that had been brewing in Poland since its partitions. On November 29, 1830, violence broke out in the streets of Warsaw and lasted nearly ten months before the Russians recaptured the capital in September 1831.<sup>368</sup> Following the collapse of their revolution, thousands of Poles fled the country to live in exile, fearing persecution and seeking to escape the arrest and deportation mandated by Russia’s post-revolution policies.<sup>369</sup> The largest initial group fled to France, the only European country that had discussed intervention on behalf of the Poles during their uprising, although that assistance never materialized.<sup>370</sup>

In the immediate years following the revolution, the image of the Polish exile ascended to folk hero status in Europe and the United States, keeping the memory of

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<sup>368</sup> Joseph Hordynski, *History of the late Polish Revolution, and the Events of the Campaign* (Boston: Published by Carter and Hendee, 1832), 10-29; Jerzy Jan Lerski, *A Polish Chapter in Jacksonian America* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1958), 6-7; Arthur Prudden Coleman, *A New England City and the November Uprising: A Study of Editorial Opinion in New Haven, Conn., concerning the Polish insurrection of 1830-1831* (Chicago: Polish R.C. Union of America, 1939). As a result, the Kingdom of Poland was officially incorporated into the Russian Empire, and the autonomous state would not reappear on the European map again until the end of World War I.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>370</sup> Lerski, 10. Following the failed Kosciuszko Uprising in 1794, a first wave of Polish refugees fled the country and settled in France and Italy. As Lerski recounts, “The Paris of Lafayette became a Mecca and remained ‘for many generations after 1831 the intellectual capital of the Polish race.’”

the revolution alive and continuing to illicit sympathy for the defeated revolutionaries after the end of the conflict. (figures 4.13 and 4.14) Popularly disseminated images in Europe and the United States represented the Polish exile as either a wounded soldier, downtrodden but embraced by the peoples of his new home in exile, or as a romantic and noble hero, forced to abandon his homeland but unbroken in spirit. For the American public, these images and the people they romanticized collided in the spring of 1834.

The Polish exiles, who to that point had been imagined figures, suddenly materialized in the flesh in late March, when 234 Poles arrived in New York aboard two Austrian Frigates, the *Guerriera* and the *Hebe*. Their arrival attracted curious onlookers to the pier, including some brazen enough to board the ships in order to scrutinize the exiles more closely.<sup>371</sup> As had taken place during the Greek Revolution, committees were formed in American cities “for the purpose of raising subscriptions for their [the Poles] relief,” and attracted the support of many of the same men who had overseen the Greek relief committees the previous decade.<sup>372</sup> The arrival and physical presence of the Polish refugees revived a wave of American sympathy for them and their cause, but the nature of the aid and relief they desired was distinct from what had been provided for the Greeks. Cash donations were called for to try and supplement the meagre immediate financial aid provided to the Poles when they disembarked.<sup>373</sup> However, because the Polish exiles were starting anew in the United

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<sup>371</sup> Lerski, 96.

<sup>372</sup> Mathew Carey, “To The Polish National Committee in the United States,” (Philadelphia: ---, 1835), in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>373</sup> Lerski, 89-90.

States, what they and the relief committees desired was stable employment for the exiles.

Unfortunately, for a number of reasons this kind of aid was difficult to secure. William Woolsey of the New York Polish Committee warned that many of the Poles were “without trade or professions and not used to manual labor,” but he believed that they were nevertheless “quite willing to learn trades...to do any work within their strength.”<sup>374</sup> Even with an eagerness to take on any kind of work, the depressed state of the American economy in the mid-1830s meant that employment was not readily available for the exiles. Finally, most of the Poles were handicapped by the fact that very few spoke English.<sup>375</sup> That search for work sent some of the Polish exiles, along with their American committee sponsors beyond New York City, to cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia where the Poles were briefly of great public interest among the local communities.

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<sup>374</sup> William Woolsey to Mathew Carey, May 23, 1834, *Mathew Carey Papers*, 1785-1859, AAS.

<sup>375</sup> Reportedly, only two of the two hundred and thirty-four exiles who arrived in the United States in 1834 spoke English, and only a small number of them spoke French or German. In 1834, a booklet titled “Dialogues, to Facilitate the Acquisition of the English Language by the Polish Emigrants” was published in Philadelphia and provided to the exiles, which included useful phrases in both English and Polish that were deemed useful for the immigrants as they established themselves in the United States. Many were basic statements but the booklet also included statements that would have allowed to Poles to defend their circumstances, ask for assistance, and flatter the person with which they were speaking. Only a few hundred copies of the booklet were printed. One is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society. “Dialogues, to Facilitate the Acquisition of the English Language, By the Polish Emigrants,” (Philadelphia: Printed by John Young, 1834).

### The Baltimore Museum's "Peristrepthic" Panorama of the Late Polish Revolution

The arrival of two young Polish exiles in Baltimore brought their situation to the forefront of public discussions in the city. On May 24, 1834, a meeting was held in the saloon of the Baltimore Athenaeum to discuss the subject of the Polish exiles in America. Several activities took place that evening. A Hymn for Poland, dedicated to "Poland's exiled sons," was performed to new music by Oliver Shaw, a respected native-born American composer. (figure 4.15) Addresses were delivered by several people: a citizen of Baltimore, an American clergyman, and a young Greek exile from the island of Scio, who had been sold into slavery after his father had been beheaded at the Scio massacre, the first great atrocity of the Greek War of Independence. He stood shoulder to shoulder with a nineteen-year-old Pole, also in attendance. Like the Greek youth, the young Pole was praised as one of "Columbia's sons," deserving of American sympathy and aid after having fought for his homeland. Together, the speakers implored the citizens of Baltimore to "clothe the naked and feed the hungry fellow-countrymen of the brave sons of Poland, Kosciusko and Pulaski, who fought with Washington."<sup>376</sup>

Calls and advertisements for other charitable events to benefit the Polish exiles appeared in Baltimore's newspapers throughout the early summer. A letter to the editor in the *Baltimore Patriot* suggested that the benevolent ladies of Baltimore "hold a general fair, the proceeds of which to be appropriated to the wants of the noble, but unfortunate Poles."<sup>377</sup> In June, a "Grand Concert for the Benefit of the exiled Poles"

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<sup>376</sup> "The Banished Poles," *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, May 24, 1834; "The Poles," *The Baltimore Patriot*, May 24, 1834.

<sup>377</sup> *Baltimore Patriot*, May 27, 1834.

was held again at the Baltimore Athenaeum. Tickets were sold for \$1, and the event was overseen and directed by Arthur F. Keene, a composer and popular vocalist who had been performing in Baltimore that year.<sup>378</sup> Indeed, commentators associated a certain local pride with these events and the participation of Baltimoreans. “Will not our citizens join ...to assist the countrymen of Kosciusko and Pulaski? We are sure they will, they will not be behind any of our sister cities, New-York, Boston, and Philadelphia, who have all given their *hundreds* towards this truly laudable work.”<sup>379</sup>

This steady interest and corresponding public sympathies inspired the manager of the Baltimore Museum, Joseph E. Walker, to commission a spectacular attraction representing the plight of the Poles, to be exhibited in the Saloon of his establishment.<sup>380</sup> Walker desperately needed a successful attraction that year to remedy his own difficult situation. The year before, he had been selected by the stockholders of the Baltimore Museum as manager of their business and failing investment. For several years they had been struggling to hold together what had once been *Peale’s Baltimore Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts*, the first franchised Peale museum outside Philadelphia operated by Charles Willson Peale’s sons, Rembrandt and Rubens. Opened in 1814 to great fanfare, the Baltimore museum slowly declined under their leadership. Their collections of art and natural history specimens,

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<sup>378</sup> *Baltimore Patriot*, December 21, 1833.

<sup>379</sup> “Grand Concert for the Benefit of the Exiled Poles,” *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 18, 1834.

<sup>380</sup> Joseph Walker is listed in Matchett’s 1831 Baltimore Directory as “keeper of Peale’s Museum.” *Matchett’s Baltimore Directory* (Baltimore: R.J. Matchett, 1831), 380.

originally exhibited in the elegant two story brick building Rembrandt had built, in the early 1830s were quietly moved to the upper floors of a new building on Baltimore and Calvert Streets. While Walker attempted to make “many improvements and additions” to the Museum to reassure the public of its “scientific character,” he suffered a major setback when a fire damaged the building in February 1833.<sup>381</sup> It took five months, but Walker reopened the museum on the Fourth of July. Over the next year, he catered to the public’s interests by hiring a variety of special performers for the museum’s “saloon”: ventriloquists, magicians, acrobats, violinists and “musical soirees,” cosmorama presentations, theatrical events, and even an exhibition of Egyptian mummies.<sup>382</sup> However, in the summer 1834, with the independence day holiday once again on the horizon, Walker needed an exhibition even more spectacular and timely to draw crowds back to the museum.

Walker commissioned a “peristrepic” panorama from itinerant artist Alfred S. Waugh. An Irish-born artist trained as a sculptor in Dublin, Waugh was likely one of

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<sup>381</sup> The Baltimore Patriot on February 14, 1833 reported that “last evening about half past 10 o’clock a chimney in the large four story building of Mr. J. Clarke, at the corner of Baltimore and Calvert Streets, proved to be on fire, and for a considerable time emitted a large volume of blaze and smoke. An alarm was given, but after some time, and on the blaze in the chimney subsiding, the occupants and others retired in supposed safety. But about half past 2 this morning another alarm was given when it was found that the upper story was on fire and there being a pretty stiff breeze from the Westward, the whole building was threatened with destruction. Before the fire was got under the first and second stories were burnt out, and from the great masses of water thrown into the edifice, much damage had been done to the other parts of it. The occupants of the first, or ground story, have received no injury by the fire, but Peale’s Museum, which filled all the upper rooms, is nearly not quite destroyed. Many, however, of the most valuable Paintings, were taken out and secured.”

<sup>382</sup> Baltimore Museum advertisements, *Baltimore Patriot*, July - March 1834.

many Irish immigrants who had arrived in Baltimore in the early 1830s, in sizable enough numbers to catch the attention of the local press, which recorded that about 150 Irish emigrants had arrived in Baltimore in June 1833 alone.<sup>383</sup> Like other working artists seeking stable income in antebellum America, Waugh accepted all work that came his way. He advertised as an architect and modeler, took portrait and portrait miniature commissions, and offered to make sculptors and models in “wood, wax, and composition.”<sup>384</sup> (figure 4.16) Waugh had no more than two months to complete Walker’s panorama, a format he had likely never attempted before, but for which he had a recent example to emulate.

The “peristrepic” panorama had arrived in the United States in 1830 and in Baltimore by 1833, the invention of Englishmen Peter Marshall and his son, William. The “Messrs. Marshall” had been exhibiting their peristrepic panoramas throughout the United Kingdom since perhaps 1815. Emulating their example, a painter named William Sinclair emigrated to the United States and presented two peristrepic creations of his own, one depicting the Battle of Waterloo, the other, the previously mentioned Battle of Navarino. Unlike the circular format of attractions like the *Panorama of Athens*, peristrepic panoramas were the forerunner to the horizontal

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<sup>383</sup> “Emigrants,” *Baltimore Patriot*, June 24, 1833.

<sup>384</sup> “Likeness of Judge Marshall,” *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, September 3, 1833; “Alfred S. Waugh,” *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, December 18, 1833; *The Maryland Gazette*, Annapolis, MD, June 12, 1834. For more about Waugh see, Carrie Rebora Barratt and Lori Zabar, *American Portrait Miniatures in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), 175. Few examples of his work survive, but the Metropolitan Museum of Art does own a portrait of an unknown gentleman attributed to Waugh, dated about 1841, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art has one of the subscription only full-length portraits of Chief Justice John Marshall in wax that Waugh advertised in Baltimore in the 1830s.

“moving panoramas” popularized in the United States in 1846. Although different in name, the two were essentially identical in format, long roll paintings wound in front of an audience from one vertical cylinder to another.<sup>385</sup> While Sinclair’s Waterloo premiered at Niblo’s Garden in New York, its first stop after that was Baltimore, where it was exhibited for several months in the summer of 1833 at the Assembly Room next to the Holliday Street Theatre. (figure 4.17) The exhibition purportedly consisted of 20,000 square feet of canvas and twelve individual views, including both landscape views and battle scenes that depicted major events of Napoleon Bonaparte’s career from Waterloo to his funeral procession in Paris, with over 10,000 figures populating the scenes.<sup>386</sup> As the first exhibition of its kind of Baltimore, the form attracted enough interest and praise for Walker and Waugh to steal the idea for their own Polish production.

The “Grand Peristrepthic Panorama of the Late Polish Revolution” was significantly smaller than Sinclair’s productions, consisting of ten scenes each eight feet high and ten feet wide. (figure 4.18) However, Waugh did follow Sinclair’s format and used the individual scenes to explain the outbreak of the November Uprising, celebrate the known Polish military victories, and criticize the cruelty of the Russians following their subjugation of the rebellion. Advertisements for the panorama claimed that its scenes were based on drawings made in Poland during the

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<sup>385</sup> For more information on the history of the peristrepthic form, see: Erkki Huhtamo, “Penetrating the peristrepthic: an unwritten chapter in the history of the panorama,” *Early Popular Visual Culture*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (November 2008): 219-222.

<sup>386</sup> See advertisements for Sinclair’s Peristrepthic Panorama in the *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, May 6 - July 6, 1833.



war by a volunteer English physician.<sup>387</sup> While this may have been true, Waugh more than likely also took direct inspiration from Joseph Hordynski's *History of the late Polish Revolution*, especially regarding the succession of events during the war. Hordynski, who arrived in Boston in late 1831, was among the earliest Polish refugees to arrive in the United States, having fought in the war and fled following Poland's defeat. Upon arriving, he recorded his first hand account of the uprising, which was published with the support of subscriptions in Boston in 1832. Public interest in the events of the revolution resulted in the publication of another three editions in the next year, and literary critics praised the work as the most complete record of Poland's affairs then published. A "Literary Notice" in the *New-England Magazine* declared that his narrative proved "that our esteem for the Poles and our abhorrence of despotism were equally well founded."<sup>388</sup>

No visual record of the panorama's scenes survives. However, combining the advertised descriptions of the scenes with contemporary European illustrations of the Polish Revolution offers a basic sense of its appearance. It also illustrates how the

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<sup>387</sup> Who the physician was is unclear, so this may have been an advertisement exaggeration meant to bolster the supposed accuracy of the scenes. However, there were known doctors who volunteered during the Polish Revolution of 1830, including a French volunteer unit and one American, Paul Fitzsimmons Eve, of Georgia. For more information, see: Kenneth E. Lewalski, "The French Medical Mission to Poland During the Insurrection of 1830-31" (New York: Polish Review, 1965); R.A. Halley, "Paul Fitzsimons Eve, A.M., M.D., LL.D.," *The American Historical Magazine* IX, no. 4 (October 1904): 281-342.

<sup>388</sup> For more on Joseph Hordynski, see Lerski, 77-84; "Literary Notices," *The New-England Magazine*, Vol. 3 (1832): 165-167. The American Antiquarian Society collection includes copies of all four editions of Hordynski's *History of the late Polish Revolution*.

attraction's narrative was tailored to suite an American audience, filled with sympathy for the late Polish cause and its heroes. The first two scenes depicted events from November 29, 1830, the evening violence broke out on the streets of Warsaw. The panorama commenced with contrasting scenes of the heroes and villains of that night. (figure 4.19) The arrest of eighty students who had gathered to honor the anniversary of the storming of Prague in 1796 and pray for their ancestors, opened the panorama, just as the event itself "exhausted the patience of the nation" and sparked the revolution.<sup>389</sup> Reportedly, the students continued praying even as the Russian soldiers stormed the building. Their bravery was contrasted with the cowardice of the Grand Duke Constantine, whose flight in the middle of the night from Belvedere Palace was the subject of the next scene. Hordynski wrote that "by his flight, Constantine accused himself. The just man fears nothing; the guilty conscience anticipates danger."<sup>390</sup>

The majority of the panorama was made up of battle scenes, carefully selected to highlight Polish victories and the skill and bravery of the outnumbered Poles against Russia's much more substantial forces. For example, the panorama's sixth scene depicted the Battle of Grochow, a great victory for the Polish forces, who managed through a carefully orchestrated attack by their infantry, cavalry, and artillery, to hold back an army reported to consist of 400,000 Russians. (figure 4.20) When the battle

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<sup>389</sup> Hordynski, 29. Hordynski's language in describing this event is echoed almost exactly in the advertisement for the panorama.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

was won, cries of “Poland forever” were shouted out over the battlefield so strewn with Russian casualties the it “received the name of the forest of the dead.”<sup>391</sup>

The penultimate scene of the panorama, the Battle of Warsaw, represented the end of Poland’s surprising military successes, as the fall and capture of the capital city on September 7, 1831 was both a symbolic and definitive defeat of the revolution. However, one final scene actually closed the panorama. It depicted the banishment of Prince Czartoryski, a leading figure in the revolutionary Polish government, and his family, an experience so arduous it may have led to the death of his wife.<sup>392</sup> This scene stretched the truth, since in reality Czartoryski spent his exile not in Siberia, but as an important member of the Polish exile communities in London and Paris. Nevertheless, the panorama’s final scene represented the continued suffering of exiled Poles around the world, including those who had fled to America in 1834.

Unfortunately for Joseph Walker, he never had a true opportunity to test out his new attraction and potentially capitalize on Baltimoreans’ enthusiasm for assisting the Polish exiles in America. While the premiere of the panorama seems to have been

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 171. At least one newspaper, Vermont’s *Brattleboro Messenger*, reprinted Hordynski’s entire account of the Battle of Grochow, on its front page. *Brattleboro Messenger*, September 22, 1832.

<sup>392</sup> I have not been able to actually confirm this. There is not much information about his wife, although her name may have been Anna Zofia Sapiuha. If so, she lived until 1864, well after the defeat of the November Uprising. However, one news report that circulated in American newspapers in 1833 might explain why the Czartoryski family was chosen for this final scene. On June 15, 1833 the *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser* wrote that “Prince Czartoryski, a Polish exile in London, is reported to have once had an income of 70,000 l. per annum, all of which he lost in defence [sic] of his country – his wife died of grief, and his children had been shot one by one in battle.” *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 15, 1833.

planned for the Fourth of July, advertisements indicate that it was delayed until the following week. It was exhibited only briefly before being abruptly pulled from the museum saloon and replaced indefinitely by other exotic attractions. What exactly happened to the panorama was never explained in the press, but the Sheriff's Sale announcements the following month, announcing all of Alfred S. Waugh's possessions for sale, may indicate he was to blame.<sup>393</sup> Most likely, Waugh had been unable to work out the mechanics required for moving his large canvas. The panorama exhibition's sudden postponement suggests that something went wrong when Waugh first attempted to unwind it from roller to roller. Waugh left Baltimore and traveled south and eventually out west, leaving Walker worse off in his business pursuits than he had been before pursuing the panorama speculation. However, their attempt to bring the Polish Revolution to life for Baltimoreans through the medium of peristropic panorama was an insightful reading of the local community that made up their audience, as it tapped into the social preoccupations of the day and realized their suitability for adaptation into the most popular spectacular entertainment form of the decade.

### **Conclusion**

The panoramas of Athens and the Polish Revolution are but two examples of revolutionary landscapes and events from around the world finding visual expression in antebellum America's entertainment halls, large and small. A circular panorama of Mexico City attracted crowds in the 1830s, and moving panoramas illustrating scenes of the Mexican-American war toured in the late 1840s. The exhibition of a panorama

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<sup>393</sup> "Sheriff's Sale," *The Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, August 14, 1834.

of “The Wars for Liberty in Hungary, Upper Italy, and the City of Rome” traveled the east coast as debate raged in Congress over whether the United States would assist the Hungarian cause, and when Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian Revolutionary hero, visited the United States in 1852.<sup>394</sup> (figure 4.21)

As a consumer product, panoramic attractions fed and reflected American interests. Often that interest was simply for the sheer spectacle of the panoramic exhibition and its new forms—diorama, peristrepthic, or moving panorama. But not always. In addition to spectacle seekers, the American entertainment market was also populated by a public well informed about events happening around the world and emotionally invested in their outcomes. Panoramic attractions did allow for a passive “arm chair travel” enjoyment, but they could also give a face to the foreign news of the day, creating spaces and scenes that could channel and amplify the emotive response produced by the good and bad international news they received largely in print. Celebrate, contemplate, or mourn, it could all be done in the panorama hall.

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<sup>394</sup> “Interesting Panorama! Of the Wars for Liberty in Hungary! Upper Italy and the City of Rome!” broadside. Philadelphia, ca. 1849. LCP; Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

## Chapter 5

### “MR. MAEZEL’S EXHIBITION”: ANTEBELLUM SPECTACLE, GENTILITY, AND THE *CONFLAGRATION OF MOSCOW*

Let all who are charmed with the true sublime,  
All the lovers of contemplation,  
And those who to pleasure devote their time,  
Go to Maelzel’s “Conflagration.”<sup>395</sup>

In 1835, twenty-five-year-old Phineas T. Barnum was searching for a public exhibition speculation to buy into that might reap him a “golden harvest.” After a series of disappointments, that year he encountered the African American woman Joice Heth. She was, reportedly, 161 years old and had once served as nursemaid to George Washington when he was a child. Through Joice Heth, Barnum made his leap into the entertainment business, opening exhibitions of this “greatest curiosity in the world” first in New York City, and then throughout New England. In “the modern Athens” of Boston, Barnum encountered Johann Nepomuk Maelzel, whose own exhibition of mechanical curiosities was also open to the public at Boston’s Concert Hall. Years later Barnum recalled, “I had frequent interviews and long conversations with Mr. Maelzel. I looked upon him as the great father of caterers for public amusement, and was pleased with his assurances that I would certainly make a

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<sup>395</sup> “The Correspondent. (For the Cabinet.) The Burning of Moscow,” *Philadelphia Cabinet of Instruction, Literature, and Amusement*, July 25, 1829 (hereafter *Cabinet of Instruction*, July 1829).

successful showman.”<sup>396</sup> This formative encounter inspired Barnum to persevere on his career path into showmanship, a choice that would later revolutionize the nature of public entertainment in America.

An obscure figure today, Johan Nepomuk Maelzel’s American career exemplifies the multifaceted nature of antebellum amusement culture and the rapidly changing public audiences to which it catered. This case study of Maelzel’s transatlantic career argues that he became one of the most respected and celebrated entertainers of antebellum America because his array of attractions appealed to distinct cultural currents among distinct American audiences. Maelzel built his initial celebrity with his most well-studied attraction, the “Automaton Chess-Player,” and infuriated his audiences by teasing them with the mystery of its operation. In his study of the chess player, cultural historian James W. Cook has argued that the attraction tapped into the era’s interests in “artful deception,” or an emerging fascination among the new middle class in identifying cultural deceits and frauds.<sup>397</sup> However, Maelzel’s chess player was not his only attraction, and in fact it was rarely, if ever, exhibited alone. Rather, it was part of “Mr. Maelzel’s Exhibition,” which after 1827 also introduced American audiences to the mechanical panorama of the *Conflagration of Moscow*.

Described as a combination of design, mechanism, and music, the *Conflagration of Moscow* was a “novel imitation of Nature” that brought before

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<sup>396</sup> Phineas T. Barnum, *The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 143-156.

<sup>397</sup> James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

audiences the catastrophic burning of the Russian city during Napoleon Bonaparte's ultimately unsuccessful 1812 campaign. Just as the *Panorama of Athens* did during the darkest moments of the Greek War of Independence, the *Conflagration of Moscow* inspired sincere emotional reactions from American spectators. The horror of Bonaparte's campaign and the destruction of the city elicited sympathy for the "affrighted and wretched inhabitants" of Moscow.<sup>398</sup> Because the *Conflagration* premiered in the United States fifteen years after the historic event itself, however, its primary attraction was less its subject than its spectacle.<sup>399</sup> The carefully executed dioramic effects domesticated the historic blaze and dramatized the event in a way that drew women and children to the theatre. Despite the terror it sometimes inspired, the *Conflagration's* spectacle became the kind of "genteel amusement" that cut across various antebellum audiences and made it arguably more popular than even the Automaton Chess Player.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> "Miscellanies...Traveling Sketches," *American Advocate* (Hallowell, Maine), August 7, 1833 (hereafter *American Advocate*, 1833).

<sup>399</sup> In the early national period, the *Conflagration of Moscow* did briefly become a hot topic of political contention between the Federalists and Democratic Republicans and further exacerbated the divide between them. For more information on that episode, see: Ivan Kurilla, "'Russian Celebrations' and American debates about Russia in 1813," *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* (September 2015): 1-10.

<sup>400</sup> After Maelzel died in 1838, his estate was catalogued and his automatons sold to satisfy Maelzel's existing debts. Maelzel's smaller machines, like the rope-dancers, sold for \$225. The chess player was purchased for \$400 and ended up in Philadelphia's Chinese Museum on Ninth and Sansom Streets, where it was destroyed in a fire in 1854. The Mechanical Panorama of Moscow was the biggest draw of the auction, selling for \$900 dollars, likely to P.L. Zaionczek, "the Polish Samson" whose act included juggling, trickery, weight lifting and magic. "Sale of Maelzel's Automaton, &c.," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, September 18, 1838.



The family friendly appeal of the *Conflagration of Moscow* allowed it to outlive its creator. Maelzel died in 1838 on a return sea voyage from Havana, Cuba, but his original attractions and imitations of his creations remained a staple in the American entertainment market. “The immense racket of imitation cannon and musketry” continued to pour out of exhibition halls into the 1850s, and perhaps even as late as the 1880s, when versions of the panoramic spectacle were “still occasionally met with in remote localities.”<sup>401</sup> Maelzel’s ability to cultivate multiple audiences and his success at exploiting separate currents in popular culture foreshadowed the future of entertainment in America and set the standard for future showmen, Barnum included.

### **The Ingenious Mr. Maelzel and His Transatlantic Beginnings**

Like the majority of professional entertainers working as itinerant showmen in early America, Maelzel came from abroad and his foreignness was an essential element of his persona.<sup>402</sup> Reportedly called the “Prince of Entertainers” by Benjamin Franklin Peale, Maelzel was also remembered as a “large, phlegmatic man, extremely irritable, yet very kind,” and with thickly accented speech.<sup>403</sup> Born in 1772 in

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<sup>401</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Passages from the American Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1900), 492; “Maelzel, John Nepomuk,” *Appleton’s Cyclopedia of American Biography* IV, James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 171-172 (hereafter *Appleton’s Cyclopedia*).

<sup>402</sup> Paul E. Johnson, “Playing with Race in the Early Republic: Mr. Potter, the Ventriloquist,” *The New England Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (June 2016): 259.

<sup>403</sup> “Beethoven and Chess,” *The Good Companion Chess Problem Club International*, May 11, 1917, 171 (hereafter *Chess Problem Club*); Antonio Blitz, *Fifty Years in the*

Regensburg, Bavaria, Maelzel was the son of an organ maker, whose craft fueled the boy's interest in both music and the intricacies of mechanics. Educated in his youth in the theory and practice of music, by his teen years Johann had become an accomplished pianist. His primary interest however was the field of mechanical inventions, so as a young man he also applied himself to understanding the mechanical aspects of his father's trade and furthering his knowledge in applied science and mathematics.

As an adult, Maelzel channeled his talents into innovative inventions. After settling in Vienna in 1792, Maelzel designed musical devices. He began making actual instruments and music boxes, but these early experiments ultimately resulted in the production of two large, self-standing musical automatons.<sup>404</sup> The Panharmonicon was a spring driven full military band contained in a pyramid-shaped box over five feet high. Operated by a concealed arrangement of weights and cylinders, the Panharmonicon brought the sounds of a full orchestral arrangement to life without a single human musician. Maelzel's next invention was an even more ambitious life-sized automaton trumpeter. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Maelzel began exhibiting his inventions throughout Europe. His Panharmonicon performed the

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*Magic Circle: Being an Account of the Author's Professional Life* (Hartford, CT: Belknap & Bliss, 1871), 167-168.

<sup>404</sup> The OED defines Automaton as “a moving device having a concealed mechanism, so it appears to operate spontaneously.” By the nineteenth century, the term was used to refer to “figures simulating the action of living beings and widely regarded as toys or curiosities, as clockwork statues or animals, images striking the hours on timepieces, etc.” Its earliest use dates to the early seventeenth century.

works of popular composers and Maelzel himself accompanied the automaton trumpeter on the piano.<sup>405</sup>

Johann Maelzel's devices garnered him the admiration of Europe's elite, best exemplified by his appointment as "Court Mechanician" by the Austrian Emperor in 1808.<sup>406</sup> However, his fame as a showman grew exponentially after he purchased and revived the famed Automaton Chess Player. (figure 5.1) The machine consisted of a wooden cabinet, about four feet long and three feet high, behind which sat a life-sized figure dressed in a white turban, a fur-trimmed jacket, loose pants and a white shirt, a Turkish-style oriental ensemble that gave the automaton its often repeated nickname, "The Turk." The Turk was the invention of a minor Hungarian official, the Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen, a member of the Royal Chamber of Domains serving Empress Maria Theresa. After being underwhelmed by a series of magnetism experiments performed before select invited members of the Empress's court in 1769, Kempelen hinted "that he thought himself competent to construct a piece of mechanism, which should produce effects far more superior and unaccountable."<sup>407</sup> The Empress approved the challenge and Kempelen returned six months later with the Chess Player, a "thinking machine" which seemed capable of reason and strategizing independently to win in chess battles against its human competitors.

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<sup>405</sup> John F. Ohl and Joseph Earl Arrington, "John Maelzel, Master Showman of Automata and Panoramas," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 84, no. 1 (January 1960), 56-7; Bradley Ewart, *Chess: Man vs. Machine* (San Diego: A.S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1980), 44-47; Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 49-50.

<sup>406</sup> Ohl and Arrington, "John Maelzel," 57.

<sup>407</sup> *Observations on the Automaton Chess Player...by an Oxford Graduate* (London: J. Hatchard, 1819), 12-13.

Kempelen's performance earned Maria Theresa's enthusiastic appropriation for its exceptional illusion. Subsequently, the chess player became a popular and sought after curiosity. For decades after his initial court performance, Kempelen presented the automaton for public demonstrations throughout the courts and public places of Europe, and was even frequently called upon at his home by strangers who were eager to examine the device. When Kempelen died in 1804, Maelzel purchased the machine from his estate, supposedly improved its design and operation and added it to his collection of mechanical curiosities. Despite the three decades that European audiences had already known of The Turk, the secret of its operation had never been successfully discerned, nor did Kempelen ever publically reveal the truth. The Chess Player was an ideal addition to Maelzel's assemblage as he embarked on a career as a showman.<sup>408</sup>

With the skills of a musician, mechanic, and inventor, Maelzel also shaped himself into a shrewd entrepreneur. Revered throughout the transatlantic world as a man of "unquestionable inventive genius," in truth many of Maelzel's inventions were only improvements of other's works. For example, although Maelzel is sometimes credited as the inventor of the metronome, a musical time-keeper that systematizes speeds for practicing musical compositions, his machine was actually a close adaptation of two fellow inventor's designs, G.E. Stockel and Dietrich Nicholas Winkel. Maelzel first attempted to outright purchase Winkel's design, but when the inventor refused, Maelzel nevertheless assimilated Winkel's pendulum design into his

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<sup>408</sup> Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 67-68; Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 34-49.

own work. He then quickly patented his metronome in 1815 in England, France, and Austria, forever tying the reputation of the device to his name.<sup>409</sup> (figure 5.2)

As he established his career in Europe in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Maelzel learned that public interest in the elements of his exhibition was spurred by interest in current events, especially as they related to the actions of French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. For example, an encounter between Napoleon and the automaton chess player in 1809 added to the machine's reputation and prestige. Maelzel, as "Court Mechanician" of Austrian Emperor Joseph II, was in residence at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna when Napoleon successfully invaded the city and turned the palace into his military garrison. During Napoleon's occupation, Maelzel convinced him to examine and play the automaton Turk in front of a crowd in the Great Gallery of the palace. Accounts attest to the Emperor's fascination with the automaton and his defeat in a chess match against the machine. News of their battle followed the Turk for decades, Napoleon's "speedy defeat" at the hands of the chess automaton adding to the machine's fame and increasing the mystery of its operation.<sup>410</sup>

And while Maelzel may have sought direct and indirect endorsements from well-known individuals including Napoleon, he profited more by capitalizing on the

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<sup>409</sup> John R. Parker, *Musical Biography: or, Sketches of the Lives and Writings of Eminent Musical Characters* (Boston: Published by Stone & Fovell, 1825), 212-215; Ewart, *Man vs. Machine*, 47; Robert Wilcocks, *Maelzel's Chess Player: Sigmund Freud and the Rhetoric of Deceit* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994): 161; *Chess Problem Club*, May 1917, 181.

<sup>410</sup> Daniel Willard Fiske, *The Book of the First American Chess Congress* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1859), 424-425 (hereafter Fiske, *American Chess Congress*); Ewart, *Man vs. Machine*, 42-51; Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 50.

emperor's failures. Following the defeat of Napoleon's forces at the Battle of Vitoria in June 1813 against the British, Maelzel turned to fellow Viennese resident and artist Ludwig van Beethoven with a scheme to profit from this decisive British victory in the Peninsular War. The two men were previously acquainted, Maelzel having sought an endorsement from the composer for his time keeping "chronometer," and subsequently designing four ear-trumpets to assist Beethoven with his failing hearing. Following the Duke of Wellington's victory at Vitoria, Maelzel requested that Beethoven compose a celebratory "battle piece" to be played on his newly improved Panharmonicon. Beethoven, struggling with financial hardships due to the crash of the Austrian state bank (a result of the continuing pressure of the Napoleonic conflict) and the recent death of a royal patron, readily agreed. The resulting composition, "Wellington's Sieg," was composed first for the musical machine and then fully orchestrated for a live orchestra and performed to great acclaim in Vienna and Munich. Maelzel's recognition of the "patriotic fervor" in Europe in the wake of the French army's defeat in Spain brought both men monetary success.<sup>411</sup>

By far the longest running and influential of Maelzel's Napoleon-inspired attractions was his mechanical panorama representing the conflagration of Moscow. Produced in the weeks immediately following the September 1812 fire, the panorama presented audiences with a representation of the manmade disaster that ultimately led to Napoleon's defeat in Russia. Set aflame by the Muscovites to prevent the French

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<sup>411</sup> Beethoven and Maelzel later partnership was fraught with conflict. From 1813 to 1817, the two men were locked in a legal battle over the ownership rights for *Wellington's Sieg*. For more information, see: Patrick Joseph Donnelly, "The Battle for the 'Battle of Vitoria,'" (M.A. Thesis, John Hopkins University, 2008).

occupation of the city, the destruction of Moscow between September 16 to September 20 left the invading army without shelter or provisions to face the Russian winter. (figure 5.3) This resulted in a call to retreat, and the combination of inclement weather and the pursuing Russian army led to the deaths of over 400,000 French soldiers by year's end.<sup>412</sup>

Some accounts claim Maelzel had been visiting Moscow and witnessed the conflagration directly.<sup>413</sup> However, according to published accounts that circulated with the panorama when it traveled to new cities throughout the nineteenth century, it is far more likely that Maelzel was in Vienna in the days immediately following the burning of Moscow. These articles relate that Maelzel initially heard reports of the events unfolding in Russia from a military courier bringing the news to the palace of the Prime Minister. On asking “what news,” the courier replied, “Moscow is in flames!” Astonished, Maelzel nevertheless recognized opportunity in the developing catastrophe. The newspaper articles claimed, “As in a time of war [when] the merchant seizes the opportunity to dispose of his military stores to the best advantage,

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<sup>412</sup> For more information on Napoleon's campaign in Russia, see: Daria Olivier, *The Burning of Moscow, 1812* (New York: Cromwell, 1966); Adam Zamoyski, *Moscow 1812: Napoleon's Final March* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004); Dominic Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York: Viking, 2010).

<sup>413</sup> Ohl and Arrington, “John Maelzel,” 57. Arrington's article is the most significant early scholarly study of Maelzel and the likely source of this rumor. Arrington's assumption that Maelzel was present to witness the conflagration of Moscow comes from the November 26, 1831 *Philadelphia Ariel: A Literary and Miscellaneous Gazette*, which wrote, “Mr. Maelzel was himself present at the burning of Moscow, and constructed this representation a short time afterwards, while the impression on his memory was yet vivid and distinct.”

so on the present occasion, Mr. Maelzel resolved to accomplish something with ‘Moscow in flames.’” In his imagination, Maelzel could picture the sights, sounds, and smells of the disaster. “In a word, he instantly conceived the idea of a grand mechanical panorama, which should represent, as nearly as possible, a facsimile of the real scene.”<sup>414</sup> Having designed and completed a plan for the mechanical panorama, Maelzel sent for “several of the most skilful artists of Vienna, to aid in carrying it into effect.” *The Conflagration of Moscow* was completed and ready for exhibition within weeks of the event itself.

Like Maelzel’s other inventions, the *Conflagration* panorama was mechanically operated, its mechanized components providing movement and drama to the depicted events unfolding before a painted backdrop of Moscow. Maelzel’s *Conflagration* was not a “true panorama,” that definition reserved for painted circular canvases, but his invention was not without precedent. For centuries, clockmakers and jewelers had perfected the design of small mechanical curiosities, creating self-contained worlds in miniature that were mechanically brought to life. For instance, in 1808, New York City-based jeweler Peter Stollenwerck began advertising the completion of his “mechanical panorama” to be exhibited for the enjoyment of “amateurs of the fine arts” at his store on William Street.<sup>415</sup> (figure 5.4) The panorama, having “cost the artist 8 years of uninterrupted application” to complete, represented all aspects of a bustling “commercial and manufacturing city.” John Cogdell, a

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<sup>414</sup> “Conflagration of Moscow,” *Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Portfolio*, October 25, 1834 (hereafter *Ladies Literary Portfolio*, October 1834).

<sup>415</sup> “Mechanical Panorama. To the Admirers of the Fine Arts,” *American Citizen* (NY), April 26, 1808.



traveler who visited Stollenwerck's panorama during a trip to New York City in 1808, was incredibly impressed with the mechanism, all contained within the width of 12 inches and set in motion by "one little wheel." In his diary, Cogdell called the panorama "the most surprising and interesting piece of machinery [he] had ever seen," and described the movement of figures across the bridges and streets, "the action of each varied according to the nature of the occupation & the strength of the laborer."<sup>416</sup> In his advertisements, Stollenwerck wrote that he hoped the "allusion" created by the perspective and the vast variety of movements would "impress the imagination with a temporary idea of real existence, and [that] for a moment the Spectator thinks he is viewing all the reality of active life."<sup>417</sup>

The Conflagration of Moscow operated under the same principal ideas as Stollenwerck's invention but was built on a much more immense scale, and with a larger number of individual components. The ideal stage size required for the Conflagration measured fifty feet wide, fourteen feet high, and 29 feet deep.<sup>418</sup> To achieve the final intended effect of recreating "the view of a great city on fire,"

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<sup>416</sup> John Stevens Cogdell (1778-1847) Diary, September 3, 1808. The Winterthur Library, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Ephemera.

<sup>417</sup> "Stollenwerck's Mechanical Panorama," broadside. New York, 1812, American Antiquarian Society. For more information about Peter Stollenwerck and his mechanical panorama of New York City, see the introduction in Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 3-19.

<sup>418</sup> John Passarow to Washington P. Gragg, October 24, 1829, Johan Nepomuk Maelzel Papers, 1828-1830, American Antiquarian Society (hereafter Maelzel Papers, AAS).

multiple components had to be interconnected and made to work in harmony.<sup>419</sup> Maelzel's playbills advertising his panorama promised that the *Conflagration of Moscow* "combined the arts of Design, Mechanism, and Music," and it did. (figure 5.5) The result was a multi-sensory creation that provided its audience with a panoramic spectacle to please "the eye, the ear, and the imagination."<sup>420</sup>

Maelzel's *Conflagration of Moscow* was an amalgam of old and new theatrical and panoramic media techniques tailored to fit both the particular needs of his subject and its itinerant nature. His incorporation of traditional scenic elements with new stage technologies increased narrative drama and heightened the illusionistic effect of the exhibition. Like traditional theatrical scenery popular in the nineteenth century, Maelzel's panorama was anchored at its core by a large canvas backdrop, painted to realistically mimic a chosen vista and add depth and perspective to the stage.<sup>421</sup> The *Conflagration's* view of Moscow prominently featured the Kremlin, the city citadel, and panned out to show the farther reaches of the city. Its composition was based upon the well-known late eighteenth-century views of Moscow painted by French artist Guérard de la Barthe between 1794 and 1797. De la Barthe, who worked in Russia from 1787 and 1810, undertook his series of watercolors of Moscow and St.

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<sup>419</sup> "The Burning of Moscow," *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, September 27, 1827.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Oscar G. Brockett et. al., *Making the Scene: A History of Stage Design and Technology in Europe and the United States* (San Antonio, Texas: Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, 2010); Peter Beudert, "Stage Painters at the Paris Opera in the Nineteenth Century," *Music in Art* 31, No. 1/2, *Music in Art: Iconography as a Source for Music History* (Spring-Fall 2006): 63-72; Vera Mowry Roberts, "Viewpoints on Nineteenth Century Scene Design," *Educational Theatre Journal* 18, no. 1(March 1966): 41-46.

Petersburg as a commission for Swiss merchant Johann Walser. Upon their completion, Walser returned to Switzerland and employed six experienced engravers to copy de la Barthe's watercolors, publishing the series in Europe and Russia beginning in 1799. (figure 5.6) The engraved views were celebrated as accurate representations of a Moscow that would cease to exist after the conflagration of 1812. Maelzel apparently took great pride in his panorama's representation of Moscow, traveling with a de la Barthe engraving of the same view. He frequently displayed it in his exhibition rooms and welcomed the comparison.<sup>422</sup>

Beyond the backdrop, the mechanical panorama filled a stage and created movement across it through several freestanding architectural set pieces. "Large churches, castles, Kremlins etc." were stacked together center stage left, along with a freestanding causeway and bridge on the right. The buildings themselves were equipped with hinged components, rooftops and spires, which "collapsed" back as the fire spread throughout Moscow. (figure 5.7) These falling elements aided in the sense of a passage of time and escalated the drama, as did the painted individual figures who

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<sup>422</sup> *Eighteenth-Century Moscow: Twelve Engravings Taken from the Paintings of Guerard de la Barthe*, A Facsimile edition of the volume originally published in 1799 with an Editorial Preface by Rainer Behrends (London: The Ariel Press, 1976). American press reviews of the *Conflagration of Moscow* after its initial October 1827 premiere mention de la Barthe. For example, *The New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* on October 12, 1827, commented that "the view of Moscow in this panorama, is an accurate copy of a painting by De La Barthe, executed in 1797, the engraving of which, by Eichler, we have seen. It is one of the best of a collection, made at the desire of the Emperor Paul I." The January 12, 1828 *Saturday Evening Post* article on "Mr. Maelzel" wrote that "the whole of a small stage is occupied with a plan of Moscow...an exact representation of that ancient city, if we may judge by different engraved views which we have seen - and one in particular, which Mr. M has hung against the door of his exhibition room."

were propelled across the causeway and bridge by a cranked pulley system. By Maelzel's estimate, there were about "one hundred and thirty divisions of the French army" and about "one hundred and two Russians, Incendiaries et al" racing across the stage every time the *Conflagration* was performed.<sup>423</sup>

The most important element and effect of the spectacle, the fire, was created by stacking multiple light filtering components on top of the backdrop painting. Transparencies (or transparency paintings)—created by painting upon fine linen with partly opaque and translucent colors—had been popular for centuries and by the nineteenth century were commonly used in theater stage design. When backlit, the translucent designs upon a transparency came to life and seemed to glow, creating brilliant lighting effects. The "spreading of fire" within the *Conflagration* occurred by slowly flooding light through a transparency painted with fire and smoke that was layered in front of the *Conflagration's* scenic backdrop. The two painted panels were separated by a thin fire screen that was slowly retracted as the exhibition progressed, letting the light from over one hundred and twenty lamps of different sizes, shapes, and shaded colors through. As the light revealed the transparency, it transferred the appearance of the fire and smoke onto the Moscow on the backdrop and created the appearance of the fire spreading to the peripheries of the city.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Albert A. Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1897): 362-366; "Schedule of Goods," "Inventory of Boxes, Cases &c," and "List of Fixtures &c. used in the Exhibition," Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>424</sup> "Schedule of Goods," "Inventory of Boxes, Cases &c," and "List of Fixtures &c. used in the Exhibition," Maelzel Papers, AAS; For more on transparency painting see: Laurence Chatel de Brancion, *Carmontelle's Landscape Transparencies: Cinema of the Enlightenment* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008). Nineteenth-century amateur art instruction manuals gave brief histories of the style and instructions on

Finally, using his training as a musician and mechanic, Maelzel designed several machines that added sound effects and music to the unfolding spectacle. As the fire destroyed parts of the city, several machines provided the appropriate sounds. An “explosion machine,” an iron box filled with hand stones, when turned by a crank handle imitated “the crack of falling buildings” and the explosion of gunpowder. When the French army began marching into the city, a “cannon machine” and “musket machine” announced their arrival. Additionally, a hand organ and “trumpet machine,” which could be operated by a single person, played “Turkish music” or a twelve trumpet military cadence respectively, at the appropriate moments in the exhibition.<sup>425</sup>

Creating the intended panoramic spectacle of the *Conflagration of Moscow* depended on the seamless integration of many elements, including the management of the lighting system and lamps, the timing of collapsible elements, organizing the movement of figures across the stage, and operating the sound machines. Maelzel or a dedicated manager recruited a team of young boys and girls before the exhibition’s premiere in a new venue and trained them to operate certain elements. While relying on a revolving team of hired hands led to occasional performance errors, when orchestrated properly, the exhibition crew’s “clockwork-like” integration brought the *Conflagration of Moscow* to life.<sup>426</sup>

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how to create them. See: W. Williams, *Transparency Painting on Linen* (London: Winsor and Newton, 1855).

<sup>425</sup> “Inventory of Boxes, Cases &c,” and “List of Fixtures &c. used in the Exhibition,” Maelzel Papers, AAS; Ohl and Arrington, “John Maelzel,” 67-70.

<sup>426</sup> John Passarow, who managed the *Conflagration of Moscow* in 1829 and 1830, left several notes in his business correspondence about problems he faced with the hired staff recruited while the *Conflagration of Moscow* was in Albany. In a letter dated August 12, 1829, he wrote, “The Exhibition went rather badly the 1<sup>st</sup> night, the girls

Maelzel's musical creations, along with his automata and his *Conflagration of Moscow* sustained his European career as an inventor, innovator, and showman through the first quarter of the nineteenth century. By 1824 however, it seems he felt the need to "abandon a field...already pretty well exhausted" and seek success in the New World, an untapped market for his mechanical curiosities. Some of his contemporaries whispered that Maelzel might have been outrunning outstanding debts in Europe, believing that his abrupt decision to leave bespoke "either haste or poverty."<sup>427</sup> Whatever his reasoning, upon his arrival in New York on February 3, 1826, Maelzel commenced the final leg of his career. Over the next twelve years, his inventions set standards in the changing world of American entertainment. Notices in newspapers announcing the arrival stateside of "J. Maelzel, Professor of Music and

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disappointed me three times, and I had to get 4 new ones half an hour before the commencement of the performances, but the people appeared delighted and no defect was perceived." John Passarow to W.P. Gragg, 12 August 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>427</sup> Fiske, *American Chess Congress*, 427-428. As described by Fiske, Maelzel's abandoned European debts date to 1811, when Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy and stepson of Napoleon Bonaparte, purchased the automaton chess-player from Maelzel for 30,000 francs. When Beauharnais had been unable to discern how the automaton worked, he purchased it from Maelzel to figure out its secret. By 1817, Maelzel wished to exhibit the automaton again. Beauharnais agreed to return the Chess player to Maelzel, but only if he received his 30,000-franc investment back in full. Although the details of their agreement are unclear, the most accepted theory is that when Beauharnais sold Maelzel the automaton, the latter agreed to pay the bulk of 30,000-franc debt from his exhibition profits, with the condition in place that the automaton never leave the Continent. Beauharnais died in 1824, before Maelzel finished paying his debt, and Beauharnais' heirs commenced legal proceedings against the showman. Harassed by the "briars and brambles of the law," Maelzel made the decision to depart for the United States.

Mechanics, Inventor of the Panharmonicon, Musical Timekeeper, &c.” gave no hint at the impact he would soon have on American audiences.<sup>428</sup>

### **Maelzel’s Mysterious Automaton’s Dazzle in America**

After his arrival in February 1826, Maelzel took two months to announce his exhibition to the public, with the first performance taking place in the assembly room of New York City’s National Hotel at 112 Broadway on April 13. Unhurried in his preparations, time was taken to tailor the hall to Maelzel’s needs, unpack his boxes, and assemble his exhibits. The exhibition premiered with the automaton chess-player, the automaton trumpeter, and Maelzel’s automaton slack rope-dancers.<sup>429</sup>

That first night, “a company of upwards of one hundred persons” took in the exhibition of Maelzel’s automatons. Newspaper reviews detailed the course of the evening in minute detail. At the appointed hour, the curtain was withdrawn and “the figure of a Turk, seated at his chess board” was rolled forward sitting at his chest, “four feet long, three high, and three deep.” To show that no individual was hidden within and controlling the Turk, several doors and drawers on all sides were opened, revealing it empty except for the automaton’s mechanism. After the inspection, Maelzel engaged a volunteer from the crowd to challenge the automaton to a game of chess. “Each party had only a bishop and two pawns, and a gentleman skilled in the game having chosen the black as affording the best chance to win the game proceeded,

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<sup>428</sup> “Memoranda,” *Philadelphia National Gazette and Literary Register*, February 7, 1826.

<sup>429</sup> Ewart, *Man vs. Machine*, 91-106; “Automaton Chess-Player,” *New York Evening Post*, April 12, 1826.

and in five moves the automaton won.” The trumpeter and slack rope-dancers closed the evening “amidst the greatest applause.”<sup>430</sup>

Following that first performance, word of mouth praise and newspaper coverage ensured packed exhibition halls in New York, and later that year, also in Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Maelzel’s automatons were a hit, night after night dazzling crowds, who were baffled by “the power which directs and governs these wonderful machines.”<sup>431</sup> As had occurred in Europe, the Automaton Chess Player’s American tour inspired speculation and debate. For example, *The History and Analysis of the Supposed Automaton Chess Player* was published in Boston after “Maelzel’s Exhibition” stopped there in October 1826. The anonymous author

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<sup>430</sup> “Maelzel’s Automatons,” *New York Post*, April 14, 1826. This review and others were copied extensively in newspapers throughout the United States; Stephen P. Rice, “Making Way for the Machine: Maelzel’s Automaton Chess-Player and Antebellum America,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 106 (1994): 1-2. Both in its historical moment and in contemporary studies since, the automaton chess-player mystery has intrigued individuals. The machine was in fact operated by a hidden individual. In Europe, Maelzel contracted the services of several preeminent chess players, who concealed themselves within the machine. Upon his initial arrival in the United States, Maelzel did not have an individual lined up. He remedied this problem by September 1826, when William Schlumberger, one of Europe’s preeminent chess players, joined Maelzel in the United States as the director of the Automaton chess player. Carefully planned chess games scenarios guaranteed Schlumberger’s victory over audience volunteers. Although some full private games were played during evening performances, it was much more common for Maelzel to set up “end games,” scenarios where selected pieces were placed throughout the board. Although the audience volunteer selected either black or white, the Automaton Chess-Player always made the first move, guaranteeing victory to the “machine” no matter what side of the board it played. For more information on the automaton chess-player and its relationship to the world of chess, see the following: Fiske, *American Chess Congress*; Ken Whyld, “Maelzel’s Little Book,” *British Chess Magazine* 120, no. 7 (July 2000): 382-384.

<sup>431</sup> “Maelzel’s Automatons,” *New York Post*, April 14, 1826.



outlined and refuted several popular theories about the automaton's abilities: that Maelzel was somehow controlling its movements, or that there was an assistant in control back stage. In the end, the author argued the most likely answer was that a "middle sized individual" was concealed within the automaton's box. (figure 5.8) However, in the end the pamphlet conceded that the chess-player's secret mattered very little. "It must be admitted to be one of the most ingenious, & completely successful contrivances, which has ever been offered to the public; instead of satisfying, it seems continually to excite curiosity, and the more one goes to see it, the more desirous he becomes, to visit it again."<sup>432</sup>

The automaton chess player's potential hoax or hidden fallacy was its claim to fame and tied it into broader cultural currents within American entertainment in the mid-nineteenth century. The most popular amusements of the era were the human or animal exhibitions, scientific experiments, and mechanical marvels like Maelzel's automatons that paraded their potential "humbug" blatantly before audiences, daring them to sleuth out the truth of what they were witnessing. Cultural historians have labeled this public fascination with deception in a number of ways, describing it as the "operational aesthetic" or interest in "artful deception." As James Cook has outlined in his study of the period, for a growing number of urban middle class Americans, the

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<sup>432</sup> *The History and Analysis of the Supposed Automaton Chess Player, of M. De Kempelen* (Boston: Published by Hilliard, Gray and Co., 1826). This pamphlet was not the first, nor the last to attempt to dissect the mysterious of the automaton chess-player. See also: Karl Gottlieb von Windisch, *Inanimate Reason: Or a Circumstantial Account of That Astonishing Piece of Mechanism, M. de Kempelen's Chess Player...* (London: S. Blandon, 1784); *Observations on the Automaton Chess Player...by an Oxford Graduate* (London: J. Hatchard, 1819); Sir David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic* (London: John Murray, 1834): 269-282; Edgar Allan Poe, "Maelzel's Chess-Player," *Southern Literary Messenger*, 2 (April 1836): 318-326.

fine line between “illusionism and illusion, realism and deceit” became one of the defining currents of American popular culture. Audiences delighted in observing and deducing truth within the veil of deception, a process that ultimately trained them to build and take in new knowledge. Enjoyment could be found in the most blatant of deceptions, because audiences could absorb themselves in finding what was odd, or what worked, or what was genuine. For Maelzel, that public scrutiny ensured his success but also laid the groundwork for his potential downfall.<sup>433</sup>

In the summer of 1827 Maelzel met with near disaster, when a pair of clever youths claimed to have definitively solved the mystery of the chess-player. “Maelzel’s Exhibition” had recently opened for the season in Baltimore’s Fountain Inn, which had a back exhibition room used for storage and to stage the exhibition before it was rolled before the public. The room was lined with windows that exposed a view directly into the room from the roofs of neighboring buildings. Two teenage boys exploited that vantage point and their discovery was soon thereafter published in the June 1 issue of the *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, in a short article titled “The Chess Player Discovered.” Months of speculation about the possibility of a concealed individual within the automaton’s case seemed proven true. “An accidental circumstance exposed...the concealed agent as he emerged from the case, just after the conclusion of an exhibition of the Automaton.”<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 57-79; Cook, *The Arts of Deception*.

<sup>434</sup> “The Chess Player Discovered,” *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 1, 1827.

A series of convenient circumstances kept the *Baltimore Gazette* article from destroying the prospects of Maelzel's exhibition. First, it had already been announced that the exhibition would close the following Saturday, likely due to the summer heat, so Maelzel was able to briefly pull back from the public eye.<sup>435</sup> Second, other newspapers contested the *Baltimore Gazette's* claims. For example, Washington D.C.'s *National Intelligencer* assumed the rumor had been planted by Maelzel, "a clever device of the proprietor to keep alive the interest of the community in his exhibition."<sup>436</sup> This incident had, in fact, revealed the automaton's mystery. The figure the two boys spotted emerging from the box was Alsatian chess champion William Schlumberger, who operated the chess player from a concealed compartment in its base.<sup>437</sup> Even though the eyewitness account was true, the story died in Baltimore.

The controversy coincided with the arrival of a number of Maelzel's other amusements from Europe including the *Conflagration of Moscow*. He had likely sent for the items following the success of the exhibition in its first few months, the *Conflagration* not having made the initial trip to America, perhaps because it was too cumbersome to pack and ship. Maelzel intended to rotate the new items into the exhibition to keep the appeal of the show fresh. The introduction of the panorama changed the nature of "Maelzel's Exhibition" by inspiring its audiences to ask fundamentally different questions regarding their experience. It also altered Maelzel's

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<sup>435</sup> "One Week Longer," *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 1, 1827.

<sup>436</sup> "The Automaton Chess Player," *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 5, 1827; Fiske, 452.

<sup>437</sup> Cook, *American Chess Congress*, 61.

persona as a showman, the composition of his audiences, and the very nature of his exhibition itself.

**“One of the most brilliant spectacles ever opened to the public”<sup>438</sup>**

On October 8, 1827, the assembled audience at Baltimore’s Fountain Inn became the first Americans to witness the mechanically animated panorama of the *Conflagration of Moscow*. (figure 5.9) “Maelzel’s Exhibition” had started at half past seven that evening. It opening with the already popular mechanical attractions, including the “Automaton Chess Player.” A moment of transition was required to ready the hall for the representation of the *Conflagration of Moscow*. A reviewer for the *Cabinet of Instruction*, reporting on later performances in 1829, provides an idea of how that audience may have reacted to what they experienced. A hush likely fell over the crowd as the exhibition hall’s lights were extinguished, leaving the audience shrouded in darkness. Some ladies may have drawn closer together nervously, the gentlemen in the crowd perhaps reached for their hats, “lest peradventure, any one should mistake another’s for his own.”<sup>439</sup> The gloom lasted but a moment before the outer curtain rose, revealing the scene.

With the rise of the curtain the audience found themselves situated as if on an elevated terrace of the Kremlin, the imperial fortress, looking out over Moscow at night. “Here out spread before him, in the depth of night, is the fated city, with the conflagration already kindled, the light of which is revealing more and more distinctly

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<sup>438</sup> “Mr. Maelzel,” *Boston National Philanthropist*, September 5, 1828.

<sup>439</sup> *Cabinet of Instruction*, July 1829.

the different parts of the city.”<sup>440</sup> That view, composed of separate painted backdrops and freestanding stage elements, included the dilapidated fortress, cathedrals, convents, ‘the great bazaars’ of the Merchants, and private dwellings, along with two bridges.<sup>441</sup>

The introduction of sounds, including the tolling of bells, trumpets, and the roar of canon and discharge of musketry, added drama to the painted elements. “As [the viewer] looks, the conflagration is gradually but rapidly extending. The smoke and flames are ascending pillar after pillar to heaven, and the moon seems to grow paler in the glare.” Human tragedy was added through the appearance of figures representing the French imperial army and the native Muscovites, mechanized to roll independently across the stage. “Entering the city in military order [is] the French army, each man of which carries a torch in his hand. Now the affrighted and wretched inhabitants commence their flight.”

Finally, the show came to a crashing end, a final moment that blended sight, sound, smell, and mechanism all together. “The conflagration has extended from the centre [sic] to the extremities of the city. A sudden and near discharge of musketry increases the movements of the flying inhabitants who are pushing on to suffering and death. Finally the explosion of a mine, and the fall of the Kremlin with a deafening crash, closes the exhibition.”<sup>442</sup> (figure 5.10)

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<sup>440</sup> *American Advocate*, 1833.

<sup>441</sup> *Cabinet of Instruction*, July 1829.

<sup>442</sup> *American Advocate*, 1833.

The press and the public, already enamored with Johann Maelzel, embraced his new attraction with gusto. Published reviews and editorials reveal how the panorama was seen as both similar to Maelzel's existing amusements, and yet in a class of its own. Reviewers celebrated the mechanical nature of the panorama, its combination of "mechanical, musical, and pictorial genius." However, they never employed the "operational aesthetic" in their writings to deconstruct the mechanical workings of the panorama, as was frequently done and detailed in editorials on the automaton chess-player. Instead, the mechanical panorama was praised for its ability to produce "a novel imitation of nature," the veracity of which was attributed to Maelzel's mechanical genius. The *Saturday Evening Post*, in their short review of the *Conflagration* from January 12, 1828, used the term "ingenious" repeatedly to describe the whole. Maelzel, the "truly ingenious gentleman," known already for his "ingenious automata," had "come among us with another exhibition truly ingenious and attractive."<sup>443</sup>

Praise for the mechanic rather than the machine may indicate a desire to forefront the supremacy of humankind in controlling the world. The 1820s and 1830s were a transformative period in urban America, when the rise of the market system and mechanization began to displace artisanal and craft professionals. The "operational aesthetic" dominated discussion of the automaton Turk because his viewers refused to accept that a machine had broken from the control of man and become entirely sentient, master of its own thoughts and actions. The deception was certainly amusing, but discrediting the illusion ensured that, at least within the

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<sup>443</sup> "Mr. Maelzel," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 12, 1828.

exhibition hall, machines continued subservient to man. With the *Conflagration*, mechanization could be admired as the technological mastery of man, not threatening but indicative of the genius of mechanical men like Johann Maelzel. The *Conflagration of Moscow* and its mechanical nature did create an illusion, “an exact representation of that ancient city,” but its effect was not diminished by attempts to discover its supposed deceptive nature and narrative fallacy. Instead, the panorama, as designed by its ingenious inventor, showed that illusion could also reveal truth.<sup>444</sup>

Unlike the other elements of “Maelzel’s Exhibition,” the *Conflagration*, as “the most perfect imitation of what we conceive to be the appearance of a vast city in flames,” may have appealed to urban dwellers because its subject matter allowed them to reflect upon a very real concern of their everyday lives.<sup>445</sup> Fires had always plagued America’s urban centers, but the dawning of the nineteenth century brought with it increasingly large, hastily built cities, higher urban population counts, and new technologies like gas lighting that increased the threat exponentially. Nearly every one of the cities that “Maelzel’s Exhibition” stopped in had had a major conflagration in recent memory. Boston had suffered a series of fire throughout the 1790s. Washington

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid; Stephen P. Rice’s article, “Making Way for the Machine: Maelzel’s Automaton Chess-Player and Antebellum America,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts History Society*, Third Series, Vol. 106 (1994): 1-16 was especially informative for this section. There is a substantive literature on the market revolution, industrialization, and its impact on urban workers and class tensions; see, for example: Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*; Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

<sup>445</sup> *The Ariel: A Literary and Miscellaneous Gazette*, November 26, 1831 (hereafter *The Ariel*).

D.C. had been set ablaze by the British in 1814, in the midst of the War of 1812. Philadelphia's Masonic Hall burned to the ground in 1819, the drama of the evening immortalized in prints. (figure 5.11) The "great fire" of New York, in 1835, destroyed over 500 buildings, including several of the most valuable dry goods stores in the city. And there were many others; urban fires terrorized Americans. Memories of fires may very well have been projected onto the unfolding drama of the *Conflagration*, allowing spectators to confront their fear and channel it, anxiety perhaps giving way to thrill and amusement.<sup>446</sup>

The single greatest difference that the addition of the *Conflagration of Moscow* made to Maelzel's existing exhibition was its introduction of an artistic amusement to the show, imbued with a specific aesthetic appeal and corresponding message. The final stanza of a poem written for the *Cabinet of Instruction, Literature, and Amusement* in July 1829 directly references the aesthetic appeal of the panorama. "Let all who are charmed with the true sublime, all the lovers of contemplation, and those who to *pleasure* devote their time, Go to Maelzel's 'Conflagration.'" The panorama, accurately representing the city of Moscow, right down to the "spires and domes [in] the mimic city," recreated for audiences the horror of the 1812 fire, one of the most "sublime and gloomy catastrophe[s]" in recent memory. From these descriptions of

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<sup>446</sup> *Great Fires of America*, by the editors of Country Beautiful (Waukesha, WI: Country Beautiful Corp, 1973); Donald J. Cannon, ed. *Heritages of Flames: An Illustrated History of Early American Firefighting* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1977); James W. Sheahan, *The Great Conflagration: Chicago: Its Past, Present and Future* (Chicago: Union Publishing Company, 1871).



the panorama's sublimity, spectators entering the exhibition hall would have understood exactly what kind of experience they were about to have.<sup>447</sup>

By the nineteenth century, appreciation of the sublime permeated all areas of American thought. Arising initially from eighteenth-century British aesthetic debates, the idea of the sublime made its way to the young United States at the turn of the century, where it was adopted and adapted to describe the particular American experience. Growing appreciation of nature led British aesthetes like Edmund Burke to articulate in their writings the differences between aesthetic concepts like the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful as they attempted to explain emotional responses to nature. In the nineteenth century the sublime became nearly ubiquitous in writings describing encounters with icons of the grandiose American landscape, such as Niagara Falls. A view was sublime when a viewer experienced a nearly indescribable dumbstruck awe in the face of nature's immensity and boundlessness. This power of nature evoked pleasure and appreciation in spectators, but also a more visceral emotional reaction, a delighted horror as respect mixed with a hint of terror. In their interactions with nature, and eventually with art and literature, antebellum Americans delighted in the sublime, finding pleasure in the greatness of nature even as they were humbled by their powerlessness against it.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> *The Cabinet of Instruction*, July 1829; "Interesting Mechanical Exhibition," *New England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser*, October 12, 1827.

<sup>448</sup> For more information on the sublime, see: Elizabeth McKinsey, *Niagara Falls: Icon of the American Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994); Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Unlike the English sublime aesthetic founded through interactions with an overwhelming natural landscape, Maelzel's panorama represented a man-made and urban sublime, one that existed not in the rural outposts sought by travelers, but within the familiar world of the nineteenth-century metropolitan city. The fire in Moscow had been deliberately set by its own people in an attempt to thwart Napoleon's Russian conquest, and quickly grew beyond control. Contemporary accounts told that it raged for over thirty-six hours, destroyed over 30,000 buildings and killed 70,000 people.<sup>449</sup> Maelzel's depiction, with its immersive representation of the slow growth and spread of the fire and the ensuing chaos and destruction, encapsulated the sublime nature of urban disaster, awe-inspiring and terrific, and capable of inspiring a deep emotional reaction.

The addition of the panorama to "Maelzel's Exhibition" transformed it into family friendly entertainment, an evening's amusement suitable not only for women, but also for the impressionable young. Maelzel's contribution to this shift in show culture began with his solo automaton performances, which did have both women and children in the audience who occasionally challenged the Automaton Chess Player on stage.<sup>450</sup> The *Conflagration of Moscow* however, solidified that shift from public exhibition tailored for intellectual debate dominated by men, to a more egalitarian space of learning and spectacle.

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<sup>449</sup> "Horrors of War - Conflagration of Moscow," *Christian Family Magazine, or Parents' & Children's Annual*, January 1843.

<sup>450</sup> Samuel Smith, a "handsome youth" of eighteen and a Mrs. Fisher both defeated the Automaton Chess Player during on-stage competitions when it was exhibited in Philadelphia in the late 1820s. Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 60-62.

The panorama's terrible sublimity became known for eliciting strong emotional reactions, particularly among its female audience members. "The novelty and grandeur of the spectacle astonished the spectators. The ladies were affected even to tears beholding it."<sup>451</sup> Ohio native Johanna Bosworth, after attending a performance of the *Conflagration of Moscow* in Philadelphia in 1834, recorded having been so shaken after they "burnt the city" that she and her companions had to "look around to see if we were all safe and sound" before returning home.<sup>452</sup> The antebellum "cult of sincerity" was a defining characteristic of the emerging American middle class, and particularly genteel women whose "natural" role it was to enforce respectability throughout society. The family parlor was the primary site for women to exert their moral influence, but commercial amusements like "Maelzel's Exhibition" also created public spaces within which it was acceptable for women to be seen.<sup>453</sup>

Johann Maelzel and his *Conflagration of Moscow* earned the approval and praise of children, their parents, and even the moralists who warned against the dangers of public amusements upon impressionable minds. Maelzel's advertisements always promoted children's tickets sold at half the price of adult ones, a standard practice. However, once he introduced the *Conflagration of Moscow* he also made a point of announcing that at his performances, "the two front benches are exclusively

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<sup>451</sup> *Ladies Literary Portfolio*, October 1834.

<sup>452</sup> Joanna Shipman Bosworth, *Diary of Joanna Shipman Bosworth, October, 1834*, in *A Trip to Washington, 1834: Papers of Joanna Shipman Bosworth, Being the Diary of a Carriage Trip Made in 1834 by Charles Shipman and His Daughters, Joanna and Betsey, from Athens, Ohio to Philadelphia*. (Chicago: H.M. Dawes, 1914), 7-12.

<sup>453</sup> Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 55-60.

appropriated to children.”<sup>454</sup> (figure 5.12) His fondness for and appreciation of his young patrons became part of his persona and the appeal of his exhibition.

Philadelphia’s *The Ariel* wrote that

Mr. Maelzel may be considered an acquisition to any place, independent of the rational amusement he affords...He is careful to reserve the best seats for the juveniles, to whom he is always very particular to show every possible attention. Besides this he invariably has refreshments handed round to them, and them only.<sup>455</sup>

Audiences and critics alike praised Maelzel’s family friendly respectable spectacular amusements. In 1833, the *Juvenile Rambler* warned readers that “in large cities there is almost constantly something going on to excite curiosity, especially in the young. Great care is necessary on the part of parents, and of youth themselves, lest they acquire habits of thinking they must witness everything they hear of.” Yet the publication named the *Conflagration of Moscow* as the most interesting object of Mr. Maelzel’s exhibition and praised him for his “unwearied pains to promote the comfort and the health of his juvenile visitors [sic].”<sup>456</sup> In 1835, the weekly children’s magazine *The Southern Rose Bud*, published in Charleston, South Carolina, printed an extensive sixteen stanza poem titled “Maelzel’s.” Each stanza described an element of an evening at “Maelzel’s hall”: beginning with the Automaton Chess player, then Maelzel’s musical Melodium, then his smaller automaton Fiddler, Oyster-woman,

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<sup>454</sup> “Maelzel’s Exhibition,” broadside. Boston, 1828, Library of Congress.

<sup>455</sup> *The Ariel*, November 26, 1831.

<sup>456</sup> “Mr. Maelzel’s Exhibition. Burning of Moscow,” *Juvenile Rambler, or, Family & School Journal* (Boston, MA), July 17, 1833.

Chinese dancer, Troubadour, and Trumpeter. The most extensive description was reserved for the *Conflagration of Moscow*:

But now comes on the best of all:  
The lights are out, and dark the hall:—  
Darkness of short duration:—  
The curtain rises,—and the light  
Bursts on our eyes, and oh how bright  
Is Moscow's Conflagration!  
Drums beating, and loud cannon roaring;—  
The bells ring long and loudly;—  
Mid smoke and flames around them pouring,  
Soldiers are marching proudly.  
The torchmen follow in each other's track;  
The women run away with bundles at their back;  
Wide spreads the dreadful fire:  
French foot-guards and artillery fleet;—  
The flying Russians in retreat;—  
Flames mounting higher and higher!  
Who listens to the noisy rattle,  
May almost fancy he has seen a battle;  
And as the smoke and flames aspire  
Almost believe the city is on fire.  
And there's the moon: behold her yet,

How calm and beautiful she seems!  
Though I should all the rest forget  
I hope that she'll be in my dreams.—

'But come dear children we must go,'—  
Up start the obedient little train;  
'Thank you, dear father, for the show;—  
When shall we come again?'<sup>457</sup>

As the exhibition toured the United States in the 1820s and 1830s, other children echoed the poem's final line. In his memoirs, Philadelphia physician and author Silas Weir Mitchell recalled seeing Moscow burn "for the thousandth time" and turning to his older brother, declaring the exhibition was "great fun, and you'd just like to come every night, always."<sup>458</sup>

"Maelzel's Exhibition," with the sustained mystery of the Automaton Chess Player and the wide appeal of its *Conflagration of Moscow*, made Maelzel a star. He was not just a showman, but a celebrity whose own reputation attracted audiences just as eagerly as his amusements. American newspapers printed biographical sketches of Maelzel in every town when he arrived, and their writers all praised his skill as a showman, his mechanical talents, and his good heartedness.<sup>459</sup> This served Maelzel well throughout the rest of his life; as his exhibition evolved, he retained the trust and

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<sup>457</sup> "Maelzel's," *Southern Rose Bud* (Charleston, SC), January 10, 1835.

<sup>458</sup> Ewart, *Man V. Machine*, 111-112.

<sup>459</sup> "Anecdote of Mr. Maelzel," *Newbern Sentinel* (NC), February 28, 1829.

loyalty of the audiences he initially seduced in the 1820s. What's more, following its initial success under Maelzel, the *Conflagration of Moscow* took on a life of its own as part of American antebellum entertainment culture, independent of its creator.

### **The Later Life and Career of the *Conflagration of Moscow***

Although Maelzel was associated with and exhibited at least two versions of his *Conflagration* until his death in 1838, throughout his American career he also elected to sell his panoramic attraction several times. The first time was in July 1828, when he advertised in the *Boston Advertiser* of his "willingness" to dispose of "Moscow to any individual or company on reasonable terms."<sup>460</sup> Daniel Fiske, who wrote the first comprehensive history of Maelzel's Chess Player and its career in the United States, published in 1859, believed that Maelzel elected to sell certain parts of his exhibition while its attractions "were at the highest," planning after the sale to return to Europe for a short time in search of other interesting mechanical items to add to his show.<sup>461</sup>

Maelzel's advertisement was answered within a month. Three gentlemen from Boston partnered together and paid Maelzel the astronomical sum of six thousand dollars to purchase "the Automaton Bass Fiddler, the Automaton speaking figures, and the Automaton slack rope dancers, and the Mechanical Panorama of the Conflagration of Moscow." Two merchants, John Lilley, an umbrella maker and Samuel Curtis, a looking-glass manufacturer, put down the initial investment to hold equally five-sixth

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<sup>460</sup> Fiske, *American Chess Congress*, 458-9.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*; Ohl and Arrington, 74.

of the whole concern, while Washington P. Gragg, an attorney, paid Lilley and Curtis one thousand dollars to own the other sixth share of the exhibition.<sup>462</sup>

Of foremost concern to the new owners was ensuring that they would not later face direct competition from Maelzel while also securing his name for their continued use, as that name recognition was part of the appeal of their purchase. In the bill of sale dated August 22, 1828, Johann Maelzel explicitly agreed “not to interfere in anyway with the arrangements or Exhibitions of the purchasers, by exhibiting my exhibition or any other or similar exhibition, in any city town village or part of the United States, where the said purchasers Exhibition is.”<sup>463</sup> Maelzel further consented to never create direct competition for the new owners by creating and exhibiting or selling items similar to the automaton slack rope dancers or the *Conflagration of Moscow*. Finally, he also granted the purchasers the privilege and authority to announce in their advertisements all the items of their exhibition by the name they were already known by, either “Mr. Maelzel’s Exhibition” or “Maelzel’s Exhibition.” With these details secured Maelzel closed his exhibition in Boston by mid-September 1828 and set sail for a six-month trip to Europe. The new “Mr. Maelzel’s Exhibition,” headlined by the *Conflagration of Moscow* and under its new management, began a new phase in the panorama’s career, touring all new cities beginning in October 1828. Opening first in Providence, Rhode Island, the Boston Company brought the well-known amusement to new audiences and expanded its notoriety into the 1830s. The Boston Company owned these portions of Maelzel’s Exhibition for three years, and

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<sup>462</sup> Articles of Agreement, 1828, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>463</sup> Maelzel’s Agreement, 1828, Maelzel Papers, AAS



eventually sold it all back to Maelzel by November of 1831. However, their tenure is well documented and provides insight into the challenges of operating an itinerant show, particularly one as popular as the *Conflagration of Moscow* that attracted the interest of other entertainers hoping to cash in on the amusement's popularity.

When it premiered before the people of Providence, Rhode Island, the *Conflagration's* reputation stirred excitement. The *Providence Patriot* of October 15, 1828 announced "by the card in this day's paper it should be noted that the 'celebrated exhibition of the Conflagration of Moscow' opens the Monday next."<sup>464</sup> Through the next month Providence's newspapers recorded public reception of the panorama, how it "excited great interest on account of its extraordinary merit," and how "everyone who has seen it, has found his expectations surpassed, though raised to a high point by the admiration of those who had previously attended."<sup>465</sup> And while headlines announced "Mr. Maelzel's Exhibition," writers noted the presence of the new management. A contributor to the *Rhode-Island American* was "particularly pleased with the neatness of the arrangements of the room, and the gentlemanly and easy manner in which the exhibitor of the [automaton] figures &c. went through the evening."<sup>466</sup> A few weeks later the same paper praised "the imposing effect produced by the conflagration, managed with a skill and accuracy that give the vivid impression

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<sup>464</sup> "Conflagration of Moscow," *Providence Patriot*, October 22, 1828.

<sup>465</sup> "Maelzel's Exhibition," *Rhode-Island American*, November 11, 1828.

<sup>466</sup> "Mr. Maelzel's Exhibition," *Rhode-Island American*, October 24, 1828.

of reality.”<sup>467</sup> After this promising start, the Boston Company subsequently took the exhibition to Baltimore, and then on to Richmond, Virginia.

In the Spring of 1829 the *Conflagration of Moscow* opened for the first time in New York City, just as Maelzel returned to the United States with additions for his own show. Rather than create competition within the same market, Maelzel and the Boston Company elected to temporarily combine their interests. The Boston Company advertised under “Maelzel’s Exhibition,” and reunited the *Conflagration* with Maelzel’s Automaton Chess Player and Trumpeter at Tammany Hall, while Maelzel’s new attractions, a diorama of the interior of the Cathedral at Reims and a musical machine called the Melodium, of Maelzel’s design, were advertised at “Maelzel’s Diorama” at 223 Broadway.<sup>468</sup> This arrangement continued until the end of the summer, when the Boston Company began making plans to branch out and move their exhibition north to Albany. John Passarow of Boston purchased an eighth share of the exhibit from Curtis, Lilley, and Gragg in June 1829. Passarow agreed to learn to play the pianoforte and how to manage the exhibition, in order to attend and direct it in the future.<sup>469</sup> Although Maelzel advised that he did not think it “advisable to think of removing there at present,” Passarow and his partners committed to the plan and were in Albany by August. Passarow’s letters reveal the struggles, disillusionment, and distrust that were built into the itinerant entertainment business during this period.

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<sup>467</sup> Maelzel’s Exhibition,” *Rhode-Island American*, November 11, 1828.

<sup>468</sup> Fiske, *American Chess Congress*, 460; advertisements in the *Evening Post*, May 1829.

<sup>469</sup> Memorandum of an Agreement, June 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

Upon arriving in Albany, Passarow gave every indication of confidence in impending success. He believed the people appeared “excessively interested” and that the populace on the whole appeared “as respectable as you can imagine.”<sup>470</sup> Passarow worked to publicize the exhibition widely, posting hundreds of large playbills in Albany and nearby Troy, on board steamboats and in the most frequented public houses and barbershops.<sup>471</sup> He sent season tickets to the most influential newspaper editors in the area to “enlist them in our cause.” Passarow also made plans to stretch the narrative of the *Conflagration* panorama. A prelude was conceived as the “Evacuation of Moscow,” which set the scene for the commencement of the *Conflagration* itself. In his letters to Gragg written throughout August, Passarow emphasized the respectability of the audiences, which frequently included distinguished gentlemen such as the Mayor of Albany, as well as ladies and persons known for their piety.<sup>472</sup> The letters give an honest report of attendance that cannot be accurately assessed from newspapers. Depending upon the weather and related circumstances, the crowd at the Knickerbocker Hall varied from “a pretty good house” to “only three or four lads” present, inducing them to close early some nights.<sup>473</sup> In many ways Passarow was still adapting to his responsibilities as primary manager of the exhibition, and in Albany he found himself struggling to deal with apparent sabotage attempts by individuals whose loyalty lay first with Maelzel.

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<sup>470</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, August 6, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>471</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, August 16, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, September 2, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

Back when Maelzel had first sold a portion of his exhibition to the Boston group, he recommended the services of a number of men who he was acquainted with and whom could assist the new owners in learning to manage the show and operate its various automata and panorama. Two men in particular, William F. Kummer and William Schlumberger, had acted as witnesses on the sales contracts and occasionally worked with the Boston group.<sup>474</sup> On Maelzel's recommendation, the Boston group hired Kummer as manager and exhibitor of the show, which he did until Passarow came on board. Schlumberger, the concealed operator of the Automaton Chess Player, was a longtime assistant and companion to Maelzel. He was trained in operating the speaking and slack ropedancers, and assisted the Boston group while it was in Albany.

Upon first meeting the two men, Passarow seemed to think Kummer a "man of integrity." That opinion quickly changed as the exhibition continued in Albany. Considerable space in Passarow's letters is devoted to complaints about Kummer, who accompanied the exhibition to Albany but spent more time reporting back to Maelzel than he did as an active part of the show. The conflict between the two men originated from Passarow's position as an untested manager, separated from his business partners. On August 12, 1829, he wrote to Gragg about an encounter he had had with Kummer and Schlumberger. As he was not yet adequately trained to operate the slack ropedancers at that time, Passarow had commissioned Schlumberger to fill that role. While Schlumberger at first "appeared perfectly willing to perform the dancers," after meeting with Kummer he returned shortly later and "began to make proposals as an agent for Mr. Maelzel, but pretend[ing] to be unauthorized by him."<sup>475</sup> Schlumberger

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<sup>474</sup> Maelzel's Agreement, 1828, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>475</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, August 12, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

agreed to perform the dancers if Passarow would grant permission for Maelzel to perform his new slack rope dancer automatons in New York, an action that violated their business contract. A flurry of correspondence with Gragg, Curtis, and Lilley eventually granted that right to Maelzel, but made Passarow suspicious towards all involved. "I believe Maelzel is a scoundrel...disposed to take every advantage of us which he possibly can take."<sup>476</sup> Schlumberger he called "extortionate," "cunning," and "mean," while Kummer's actions Passarow believed displayed "the malignity of the viper."<sup>477</sup> Although attempting to stay on good terms with Maelzel, the Boston group learned not to trust individuals who, despite friendly appearances, were ultimately competitors.

Following the end of their run in Albany, Passarow and the Boston investors "decided in favor of New Orleans as the most advantageous for our concern."<sup>478</sup> Passarow's correspondence as they prepared to leave is primarily occupied with employing assistants they were positive they could trust. Any and all difficulties had in Albany with the *Conflagration* he asserted "originated and were devised by himself [Maelzel] and Schlumberger was taught to execute them. When I rid myself of his people my troubles ceased."<sup>479</sup> That opinion turned out to be optimistic. In New Orleans the exhibition was troubled by lack of good venue options, bad weather,

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<sup>476</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, September 2, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, October, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>479</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, October 24, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

disease, and heavy expenses that cut into their profits.<sup>480</sup> In late 1829 and into 1830 Passarow determined nevertheless to continue touring, stopping in Nashville and with plans to continue to “Louisville, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and so on to one of the Atlantic States.”<sup>481</sup> By May of 1830 however, Passarow seemed resigned to the probable failure of their enterprise. He believed that the charm attached to Maelzel’s name, “like that formerly belonging to the ‘Conflagration,’ has desolved [sic]” and that the best opinion for them was to blend their exhibition once again with Maelzel’s attractions in a partnership. “I feel assured certain that neither his exhibition or ours will do well alone. We want something to make out a full evening and he wants Moscow.”<sup>482</sup> Passarow believed that if they could convince Maelzel to blend the exhibitions together “a very large sum of money would be realized,” but only if they were together. “Separate, no profits can be made.”<sup>483</sup>

The scheme ultimately was in vain. There is no evidence that Maelzel ever agreed to partner with the Boston Company again. Instead, they seemed to have turned to their last resort, to “sell the concern if possible.”<sup>484</sup> The exact date of sale is not clear, but a passing mention in *The Ariel* from November 1831 indicates that it happened prior to that date. Writing about the *Conflagration*, the article claims that “after showing it awhile, Mr. Maelzel sold it to a company of gentleman in Boston for

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<sup>480</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, November 5, 11, 16, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>481</sup> Passarow to W.P. Gragg, May 27, 1829, Maelzel Papers, AAS.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

\$6000: they meant to send it through the country towns for exhibition; but from ignorance of its complicated machinery, they suffered it to fall into decay, from which Mr. Maelzel revived it, and again added it to his collection.”<sup>485</sup> In Lilley, Curtis, Gragg, and Passarow’s experience we see the challenges of the itinerant amusement business, even when exhibiting an attraction like the *Conflagration* with a solid reputation and public interest base.

During the first few years of its American exhibition, the panorama’s interests were inevitably tied to Johann Maelzel and his other popular mechanical amusements. The *Conflagration of Moscow* could find new audiences but the longevity of their interest was stunted without an array of other complementary attractions like the Automaton Chess Player. In addition, the intricacy of Maelzel’s invention did not lend itself to easy mastery by outsiders. By the early 1830s, Maelzel’s entire exhibition was back together, but it faced new competition. Copies of the panorama began appearing on the market and were integrated into popular museum exhibitions that sought to capitalize on notoriety of the *Conflagration* to attract genteel amusement seekers to their own institutions.

Audiences did not always welcome the copies as acceptable substitutes for Maelzel’s original spectacle. In July 1835, an exhibition of the *Conflagration of Moscow* was announced in New Haven, Connecticut. After the show’s opening night, the *Connecticut Herald* printed a detailed account of the public excitement at the panorama’s arrival in town, and their subsequent disappointment when it became clear over the course of the evening that something was amiss. After sitting through the

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<sup>485</sup> *The Ariel*, November 26, 1831.

performance of “Signor Somebody,” who was to “edify the by-standers by balancing a sheet of paper on his nose,” the conflagration began. It was found to be “a mere piece of scenery, farther below Maelzel’s than Maelzel’s is below Bonaparte’s. One redeeming circumstance there was indeed; and that was, the conflagration of nine days was all shown up and finished in about nine minutes.”<sup>486</sup>

Despite their uncertain quality, copies of the *Conflagration* became a common sight in both exhibition halls and the ballrooms of small popular museums. Playbills for traveling exhibitions in the 1830s show Conflagrations of Moscow in conjunction with a variety of other attractions: “a panoramic view of the Fairmount Water Works,” the “Fantoccini Automata,” and “acts of Natural Magic and Ventriloquism.”<sup>487</sup> Museums in Albany, Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia hired itinerant versions of the spectacle for short engagements and also made the *Conflagration* permanent additions to their collections.<sup>488</sup>

Museum entrepreneur Frederick Dreer pursued the latter tactic in Philadelphia. Born in 1782 in Hanover, Germany, in late 1834 or early 1835 Dreer changed careers. He became the proprietor of a small museum and entertainment venue at 169 Chesnut Street, on the northwest corner of its intersection with Fifth Street, directly facing the Pennsylvania State House. (figure 5.13) Dreer first appears in Philadelphia’s city

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<sup>486</sup> *Connecticut Herald*, July 7, 1835.

<sup>487</sup> “Splendid Exhibition Now Open at the Odd Fellows’ Hall,” broadside. Philadelphia, 1834, Library Company of Philadelphia (hereafter LCP); “Exhibition of the Conflagration of Moscow,” broadside. Philadelphia, 1835, LCP; “Mr. Harrington, The Ventriloquist,” broadside. Boston, 1835, AAS.

<sup>488</sup> “Museum,” *The Baltimore Patriot*, August 29, 1834.



records in 1808, advertising his services as a cabinetmaker in partnership with John Pfile. Dreer had likely immigrated to the United States just prior to that, sometime in his twenties; by 181, he had become a naturalized citizen. He was married the following year and subsequently became a noted member of Philadelphia's German Lutheran community.<sup>489</sup> Although the address of his cabinet shop changed a number of times between 1808 and 1835, Dreer spent the majority of his adult life working in this trade.<sup>490</sup> He advertised his ability to produce tall case clocks, sideboards, and desk and bookcases in the Federal Style. (figure 5.14)

In 1835, at fifty-three years old, Dreer embarked upon a new business venture with his "American Museum." Dreer's small amusement venue took up residence in rented rooms in a highly visible area of Philadelphia, presenting itself publically as a site for day and nighttime entertainment. The nature of its rooms and their number are unknown, but the bulk of the museum's "rare and valuable specimens of Natural History" were fitted into twenty-one display cabinets. This collection of curiosities was akin to the cabinets of wonders so popular with elite collectors and early museums of the eighteenth century, and was likely purchased intact by Dreer.<sup>491</sup> There

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<sup>489</sup> John D. Lawson, *American State Trial: A Collection of the Important and Interesting Criminal Trials*, Vol. 12 (St. Louis: F.H. Thomas Law Book Company, 1919), 800-896.

<sup>490</sup> Dreer's Card file in the *Database of American Craftspeople, 1600-1995*, compiled by Winterthur Museum; the index records Dreer's active work years from 1808 to 1835, with his workshop moving from Second Street, to Race Street, to Fifth Street, and finally settling permanently from 1821 to 1835 at 152 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street. See also Deborah Decuff-Barone, "Philadelphia Furniture Makers, 1800-1815," *Antiques* (May 1991), 982-988.

<sup>491</sup> It was not uncommon for entire museum collections to be sold at once in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Peale's did this when their Philadelphia

were thousands of curiosities in the collection. It included preserved animal specimens, such as the “1428-pound Turtle” pulled from Delaware Bay in 1837; mineral specimens; and ethnological specimens described primarily as “Indian and Chinese.”<sup>492</sup> These natural history specimens and the “Grand Cosmorama” in the museum, equipped with twelve views depicting locations around the world and a corresponding “large Lens” for viewing each, were standard practice for America’s early museums. Dreer’s American Museum however, was also equipped with an “exhibition saloon” or hall, a space where traveling acts and exhibitions were made available to paying visitors.

To stay competitive in a highly competitive market, Dreer kept a revolving roster of acts in his saloon and tied his American Museum to an exhibition with enough popular appeal to continue attracting audiences, both new and returning. From almost daily advertisements in Philadelphia’s *Public Ledger* from early 1836 to June 1839 and the American Museum’s extent cashbook (which documents daily net and gross receipts for exhibitions between February 1835 and January 1838), the American Museum’s schedule of exhibitions and money made can be ascertained. For 1835, the best cataloged year in the cashbook, nine booked engagements are recorded, including acts such as a “phantasmagoria exhibition,” a panorama of the “destruction of the cities of the plain, or the Last Days of Sodom and Gomorrah,” and three

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Museum folded, and P.T. Barnum later purchased John Scudder’s New York City “American Museum” in 1841, making it the foundation of his own future establishment.

<sup>492</sup> M. Thomas & Son, “Positive Sale, by Auction of the American Museum, Corner of Chesnut and Fifth Sts, Philadelphia” (Philadelphia, C.I. Hughes Printer, 1839) (hereafter American Museum Auction Catalog, 1839).

separate engagements with exhibitions of the *Conflagration of Moscow*, among others. The total receipt for those twelve months was \$7041.68, with Moscow alone taking in \$3957.46.<sup>493</sup> With ticket sales ranging between twenty five cents to fifty cents (with children under 10 half price), the Conflagration exhibits were far and away the most popular and lucrative.

It seems likely that the three exhibitions in 1835 were all different versions of the Conflagration, or at least two separate versions. Records noting the first engagement, from April 16 to June 6, 1835, and the second, from July 23 to September 5, 1835, each explain the terms of settlement with separate proprietors for how the profits would be divided. The final 1835 engagement, however, from December 21 to January 30, 1836, appears in a different manner. No proprietor is mentioned, no splitting of the net receipt, and on Dreer's expenses page, he records a number of new payments to be made: "five assistants for Moscow," a "crank man," and a "lamp boy."<sup>494</sup> From early 1836 until the museum's close, announcements for "the celebrated panoramic spectacle of the Conflagration of Moscow" at the American Museum appeared with regularity in the *Public Ledger*. Although at present it is not possible to ascertain what version of the spectacle this was, what is clear is that Dreer had purchased a copy of the *Conflagration* for the American Museum's permanent collection. The mechanical panorama's presence among the museum items auctioned off in 1839 confirms this.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> Frederick Dreer Cashbook, 1835-1838, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter referred to as Dreer Cashbook).

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> American Museum Auction Catalog, 1839.

From 1836 to 1839 then, the Conflagration of Moscow became the cornerstone of the American Museum's exhibition schedule. It was announced for engagements of at least a month's duration seven times by the end of 1838, and was the museum's final advertised entertainment the week it closed. It became the supporting, and dramatic, conclusion for the array of revolving acts that passed through the museum's exhibition saloon, and was used to fill gaps when no other acts could be booked. Other amusements did return multiple times, especially magicians and ventriloquists, but no entertainment was advertised as often at the American Museum than the burning of the great city of Moscow.

The fate of both the humble American Museum and the "Conflagrations" of Moscow can be attributed to the changeability of America's urban entertainment landscape. Beginning in April of 1838, "museum for sale" announcements began appearing in the *Public Ledger*. They related that "the proprietor...being desirous of retiring from business (mainly through the infirmities of age), was induced to dispose of the entire American Museum on "advantageous terms."<sup>496</sup> It is possible that the fifty-seven-year-old Dreer elected to sell out for personal reasons, but the museum's cashbook paints another picture. Its final page, recording all expenses for a year up to February 1838, shows over \$4500 dollars owed: for rent, advertising, improvements, and performers salaries, among other bills. Cash receipts for that year barely exceeded that amount, at just over \$4900."<sup>497</sup> The profit margin for the year was low, and quite

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<sup>496</sup> "Museum for Sale," Advertisement, *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, April 22, 1839.

<sup>497</sup> There are notes for payments received from certain entertainers their "share of losses of exhibition," but those were one-time payments. It also makes sense that Dreer was demanding these backed payments because of how tight money was.

likely worse in the museums subsequent final year and a half. The small amusement venue suffered the fate of many other similar institutions, sold and dismantled, unable to stay competitive in the quickly evolving world of America's commercial entertainment landscapes.

However, the closing of Dreer's American Museum did not end the career of the *Conflagration of Moscow*. Into the 1840s the panorama was still touring the United States, adopted by several of the itinerant entertainers who had once worked with both Dreer and Maelzel. For example, Henry and William Hanington of New York City, who had presented their "grand moving dioramas" at the American Museum in the fall of 1836, began advertising their own diorama of the burning of Moscow soon after.<sup>498</sup> Jonathan Harrington, a ventriloquist and illusionist from Boston, was a headliner at the American Museum at least four times. By 1836 he too began exhibiting a "new magnificent" version of the *Conflagration of Moscow*, and made it part of his own museum in Boston before it too closed in 1842.<sup>499</sup> In the United States, representations of the burning of Moscow continued through the 1860s, or even into the 1880s, when

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<sup>498</sup>"Hanington's Grand Moving Dioramas, from the City of New York," broadside. Philadelphia, 1836, LCP; Peter E. Palmquist, *Pioneer Photographers from the Mississippi to the Continental Divide: A Biographical Dictionary, 1838-1865* (Stanford University Press, 2005): 303; "The Conflagration of Moscow," *Southern Patriot* (Charleston, SC), January 12, 1838. The advertisement relates that "Maelzel has a powerful competitor in Hanington, they both present excellent representations of this terrific event."

<sup>499</sup> Dreer Cashbook; "Concert hall corner of Court & Hanover Streets: Mr. Harrington, the ventriloquist," broadside. Boston, 1836, AAS. Jonathan Harrington's museum apparently succeeded Ethan Allen Greenwood's New-England Museum in Boston in 1840 and operated for two years before his collections of Natural History and taxidermy were absorbed into Moses Kimball's Boston Museum.

versions of the panoramic spectacle could “still occasionally be met with in remote localities.”<sup>500</sup> (figure 5.15)

### Conclusion

In his 1898 memoir, *Fifty Years in the Magic Circle*, the magician, necromancer, and ventriloquist Signor Antonio Blitz fondly remembered his friend Mr. Maelzel, with whom he had partnered on “liberal terms” for a short time beginning in 1836. Recounting the details of their first joint performance, Blitz preserved his friend’s thoughts on what their responsibility to their audience ultimately was. “My dear Blitz, you are an excellent performer, but you must not make the people laugh so much. It is not shenteel to make ha! Ha! They laugh too loud; that’s not shenteel.”<sup>501</sup> Through the wonder, occasional fury, and public emotion they elicited, Mr. Maelzel’s mechanical wonders and picturesque dioramic destruction of Moscow embodied this “genteel” character in amusements that was such a significant factor in his success and in that of his colleagues and the showmen who followed in his wake.

Johann Nepomuk Maelzel and his *Conflagration of Moscow* unlocked the secret to show business success in antebellum America, something other panoramacists and popular entertainers struggled to do. The explanation is multilayered. Where circular panoramas like Catherwood’s encouraged only contemplative awe, the *Conflagration* provoked thrill. Where other itinerant exhibitions quietly disappeared once public interest in them inevitably waned, the

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<sup>500</sup> Appleton’s *Cyclopedia*, 1888, 172.

<sup>501</sup> Blitz, *Fifty Years in the Magic Circle*, 167-168.

burning of Moscow ensnared the public imagination and lived on decades after Maelzel's death. And where theatrical performances struggled to attract genteel audiences through the mid nineteenth century, "Maelzel's Exhibition" delighted men, women, and their families and provided them a respectable public venue to perform and display their gentility. Maelzel's ability to entertain and appease the moral concerns of his middle class audiences cemented his reputation as "the prince of entertainers" and inaugurated a marked shift in the entertainment culture of nineteenth-century America.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

The most lauded chapter of the American panorama phenomenon began in a roughly hewn wooden building on the outskirts of Louisville, Kentucky in the mid-1840s. It was in that building that artist-entrepreneur John Banvard began “the herculean task of painting a panorama of the Mississippi.” During a visit to the studio, Banvard’s childhood friend Selem Woodworth described “chaos and confusion,” the floor scattered with “piles of original sketches, bales of canvas, and heaps of boxes. Paint-pots, brushes, jars and kegs were strewed about without order or arrangement, while along one of the walls several large cases were piled, containing rolls of finished sections of the painting.” Despite the disorder, Woodworth was impressed by the segments of the painting he could see, and its novel exhibition form. “It will be placed upon upright revolving cylinders and the canvass gradually will pass before the spectator, thus affording the artist the opportunity of explaining the whole work.”<sup>502</sup> From these humble beginnings, Banvard’s “moving panorama” inspired admirers to declare it “one of the most exquisitely beautiful exhibitions which it has ever been our

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<sup>502</sup> Selem Woodworth’s letter to General George P. Morris of New York, dated April 13, 1846, is reprinted in full in the pamphlet, *Banvard; or the Adventures of an Artist, An o’er true Tale* (London: Printed and Published by W.J. Golbourn, 1848), 14-16, as cited in McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi*, 27-28; John Hanners, “‘The Great Three-Mile Painting’: John Banvard’s Mississippi Panorama,” *Journal of American Culture* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 33.



good fortune to witness” and set off a “panorama mania” throughout the United States and Europe.<sup>503</sup>

Over fifty years of panorama exhibitions in America culminated in the emergence of the “moving panorama” in 1846, distinct in name but quite reminiscent in form to the “peristrepic” panorama that had arrived in the United States the previous decade. Unlike circular panoramas or Daguerre’s Diorama, these new attractions were fully liberated from the confines and necessity of a specially built exhibition space, free to travel from venue to venue. Moving panoramas took seated audiences on a journey. These enormous paintings no longer sat silently before their viewers, or surrounding them; through a crank system, they were moved on stage between one larger roller to another. The effect of this new format on audiences was immediate: “But how deceived! It is, from the beginning to the end, one of the most living, charming things which ever came from the hand of man. You can hardly believe that you are not standing on the bank of the river, as it flows by...Such perspective! Such coloring! Such illusions! Oh it is perfectly enchanting!”<sup>504</sup>

The height of their considerable popularity lasted less than ten years, through the mid-1850s, yet the notoriety of moving panoramas has steered examinations of the full panorama phenomenon in America.<sup>505</sup> This has created a distorted picture of the first half of the nineteenth century, when panoramic exhibitions were true experiments

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<sup>503</sup> “A Splendid Panorama,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, October 20, 1846.

<sup>504</sup> “Wonderful! Wonderful,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, December 29, 1846.

<sup>505</sup> Gabriele Koller, ed. *The Panorama in the Old World and the New* (Amberg, Germany: International Panorama Council, 2010), 5.

and speculations within an unpredictable commercial amusements market, all but a few participating artists were relatively unknown, and the relationship of panorama exhibitions to American audiences was still evolving. By focusing on the first half of the nineteenth century, this dissertation has attempted to correct this imbalance and will conclude by providing a more measured understanding of the moving panorama within the distinctive career of panoramic entertainments in America.

Just as in the earlier period, “the panoramic opportunity” after 1846 was part of a distinctive tier of the American art economy predominately embraced by ambitious working artists seeking exposure, career advancement, and fortune. John Banvard and his *Moving Panorama of the Mississippi River* exemplify this. By his own third-person account, he was a self-taught painter: “He studied the omnipresent works of the One Great Living Master!—Nature was his teacher.”<sup>506</sup> A sickly youth, Banvard “amuse[d] himself by drawing and painting,” talents he later embraced as a young man when he moved west after the death of his father. In the early 1830s he abandoned his work as an apothecary’s helper to pursue a career as showman and painter. He “got up” some dioramic paintings and fitted them for exhibition on a flat boat capable of traveling down waterways, designed his own *Panorama of Venice*, a place he had never seen, and bought into a museum enterprise in St. Louis. These projects prepared him for his “grand project of painting the Panorama of the Mississippi.” His “three-mile painting” opened in Boston in December 1846 and

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<sup>506</sup> *Description of Banvard’s Panorama of the Mississippi & Missouri Rivers, extensively known as the “Three-Mile Painting”* (London: Printed by W.J. Golbourn, 1849); Hanners, “‘The Great Three-Mile Painting’: John Banvard’s Mississippi Panorama,” 28.

began an unprecedented and highly publicized six month run that reportedly entertained upwards of 200,000 people at Boston's Amory Hall and earned the self-made showman over \$50,000.<sup>507</sup>

Banvard's example inspired fellow limners and would-be competitors. The Mississippi canvas spawned at least four similar panoramas that competed with Banvard in the United States and in Europe in the late 1840s, when several American moving panoramas traveled abroad. (figure 6.1) John Rowson Smith, Samuel Stockwell, and Henry Lewis left careers in scene painting and theater design to embrace the panoramic opportunity. Furthermore, the first moving panorama booked at Boston's Amory Hall after Banvard was Walter McPherson Bayne's *Gigantic Panoramic Picture of a Voyage to Europe*. Bayne had long been a painter for several of Boston's theaters and in preparation for this new enterprise, asked the advice of British diorama proprietor William Gordon. Gordon replied, "Your scheme – if you will take the advice of an old showman – is rather too Extensive... Boston to Halifax is all very well – but you going beyond Liverpool to London taking in the town will never do at all – it will be too long, set the audience yawning."<sup>508</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the increasing professionalization of the fine arts in America and heightened visibility of panoramas in the public eye widened the growing gap between these high and popular art forms. Panoramas, despite the constant advertisement claims of their proprietors to the contrary, were not considered fine art. Their rough, simplistic compositions came to be expected as a marker of the attraction,

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<sup>507</sup> *Boston Public Transcript*, November 29, 1847.

<sup>508</sup> William Gordon to Walter McPherson Bayne, 28 March 1847, Walter McPherson Bayne Papers [1795-1859], Boston Public Library.

which required not minute perfection but rather expansive breadth to make the most impact. This point was emphasized in *Art Recreations*, a popular art amateur's instructional manual first published in 1859, which provided guidance on everything from pencil drawing, to hair work, to taxidermy, and even panorama painting. "It should be remembered, in all paintings of this character, that fine and delicate touchings are not necessary; indeed they are not suitable in any way, as they detract from the boldness of the picture."<sup>509</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, after visiting Benjamin Champney's *Panorama of the Rhine*, made a similar observation, that the grand picture "is painted beautifully, too beautifully and carefully to give strong effects as scene painting."<sup>510</sup> One notable exception in that growing divide occurred in 1850, when artists Joseph Kyle and Edward Harrison May enlisted colleagues from the National Academy of Design in New York to contribute designs for a panorama project they were planning, representing the seventeenth-century tale of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. Among the contributors were members of the influential "Hudson River School" of American landscape painting, including Frederic Edwin Church, Jasper Cropsey, and Daniel Huntington. This unprecedented connection to the National Academy of Design, which had been founded in 1825 to promote fine art in America, and the contribution of these influential, wholly "fine" artists added interest and appeal to the panorama. The Academy itself promoted the panorama as "equal if

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<sup>509</sup> L.B. Urbino, *Art Recreations: being a complete guide to pencil drawing, oil painting, water-color painting...panorama painting, coloring photographs, enamel painting, etc.* (Boston: Shepard & Gill, 1873 [1859]), 63.

<sup>510</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Journals [1836-1875], 6 January 1849. (unpublished transcription, Longfellow House Washington's Headquarters, Boston, Massachusetts) (hereafter Longfellow journals).

not superior to any work of the kind ever exhibited in this country.”<sup>511</sup> If the proprietors’ reports can be believed, the speculation was a success, earning Kyle and May a reported \$100,000 in its first six months on exhibition.<sup>512</sup>

Advertised gross receipts like these for *Pilgrim’s Progress* or for Banvard’s Mississippi panorama create the impression that panorama exhibitions were one of the most popular and profitable amusements of the nineteenth century, a generalization that does not reflect their economy reality. In fact, since the introduction of circular panoramas to the United States in 1794, public interest in the subject matter and spectacle of these exhibitions ebbed and flowed, reignited every few decades by the introduction of new forms: dioramic paintings, peristrepthic panoramas, and the moving panoramas of the late 1840s. With each new infusion of content and forms came renewed enthusiasm and rumors about their profitability. This cyclicity produced a boom and bust pattern in the panorama business, as the rumors of one triumph inspired subsequent speculations that ended in failure just as readily as success. In his memoirs, artist Benjamin Champney explicitly admits that rumors motivated his one and only panorama speculation. “During that winter (1846) Banvard brought his Panorama of the Mississippi to Boston. It had made a very successful tour (financially) through the country. The phenomenal success of what was a

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<sup>511</sup> “Panorama of Pilgrim’s Progress,” *Newark Daily Advertiser* (NJ), May 3, 1851.

<sup>512</sup> *The Grand Moving Panorama of Pilgrim’s Progress* (Montclair, NJ: The Montclair Art Museum, 1999), 14. For an examination of the surviving panorama and its design influences, see: Jessica Skwire Routhier, Kevin J. Avery, & Thomas Hardiman Jr., *The Painters’ Panorama: Narrative, Art, and Faith in the Moving Panorama of Pilgrim’s Progress* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2015).

commonplace work gave me the idea that something might be done with another river, viz.: - The Rhine.”<sup>513</sup>

Overhead expenses for moving panoramists were lower than those of their predecessors, and exhibitors were free to travel in search of new audiences. A moving panorama proprietor had to pay for a narrator and a musician to play accompanying music as his painting moved, but those expenses were small compared to those of their predecessors, who had to build and maintain entire exhibition venues. Nevertheless, the itinerant showman’s trade was unpredictable, and for every Banvard-scale tale of triumph there is another of failure. This does not fit into the assumptions of success that have come to define contemporary understanding of this nineteenth-century attraction.

While financial failures are not as proudly recalled as successes, there are many examples. In 1848, William Hutchings’ *Panorama of the Seas and Shores of the Mediterranean* never grew into a touring exhibition. After a respectable six month run at Boston’s Masonic Hall, the panorama had only brought in \$1638.73. However, those gross receipts were dwarfed by the \$2956.38 in expenses Hutchings had accrued.<sup>514</sup> After the death of his wife in 1850, Pennsylvania artist David Gilmour Blythe threw himself into the planning and execution of a moving panorama depicting the Alleghany Mountains. He spent two summers taking sketches and painted his

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<sup>513</sup> Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years’ Memories of Art and Artists* (Woburn, MA: MCM, 1899), 79.

<sup>514</sup> W.E. Hutchings, Manuscripts, programmes, etc., relating to his Grand classical panorama of the sea and shores of the Mediterranean, executed by A. Hewins, 1848, Allen A. Brown (1835-1916) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

seven-foot-tall, two-hundred-foot long panorama at his studio in Unionville. Local enthusiasm for the project earned Blythe several financial partners, but unfortunately, the panorama only managed to make a small number of select stops in Cumberland and Baltimore, Maryland and Cincinnati, Ohio before the enterprise fell apart and Blythe's backers withdrew their financial support. As a result, the artist himself was left destitute, forced to return to portraiture and, eventually, the urban genre paintings for which he is best known for today.<sup>515</sup>

In contrast, Benjamin Russell and Caleb Purrington's *Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage Round the World* did tour successfully throughout the Midwest and East Coast between 1848 and 1851.<sup>516</sup> However, Russell found life on the road difficult, and reported that the competition among urban amusements impacted his profits. While in Detroit in May 1850, Russell lamented that it was "the Busy season of Business," and that "all these things combined have had the effect to give me no great or satisfactory results."<sup>517</sup> In Detroit he was forced to compete for audiences with

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<sup>515</sup> David R. Majka, *Strangely Gifted: Collected Poetry and Recollections of David Gilmour Blythe* (Pennsauken, NJ: BookBaby, 2017); Erika Schneider, *The Representation of the Struggling Artist in America, 1800-1865* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015), 143-144; Aaron Skirboll, "The Gritty Realism of Genre Artist David Gilmour Blythe," *Belt Magazine* (January 13, 2015). Panorama signed contract, Blythe/Hadden File, Pennsylvania Room, Unionville Public Library.

<sup>516</sup> The panorama survives in the collections of the New Bedford Whaling Museum in New Bedford, Massachusetts and was undergoing conservation in the summer of 2017.

<sup>517</sup> Benjamin Russell to Henry F. Thomas, 26 May 1850, Henry F. Thomas Papers [1841-1859], New Bedford Whaling Museum Research Library. For more on the *Panorama of a Whaling Voyage Round the World*, see: Michael P. Dyer, "Revisiting the Content and Context of Russell and Purrington's 'Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage Round the World,'" in *The Panorama in the Old World and the New*, edited by Gabriele Koller (Amberg, Germany: International Panorama Council, 2010), 52-

the Presbyterian Church, “who have meetings throughout the place, night & day,” a theater, other panoramas, and the magician Signor Blitz. In Baltimore a year later he complained of concerts, Shakespeare readings, operas, and “Ethiopeans,” and “everything in the way of attractions.”<sup>518</sup> While he seems to have mailed some money to associates in New Bedford, Massachusetts, it is likely that Russell overall did not profit from his venture. Benjamin Champney also lamented in the winter of 1848 that his *Panorama of the River Rhine* was “paying little more than the running expenses.” When it proved “not a success in a money point of view,” Champney sold the painting. It changed hands several times until October 1858, when it burned in the destruction of the New York Crystal Palace building. For his part, Champney later wrote “I was rather glad it was out of existence for it had been a source of anxiety to me from the moment of its being put on exhibition.”<sup>519</sup> Of course, profitability cannot be the only marker of the panorama exhibition’s contemporary significance, but reconstructing the struggles of proprietors allows for a more nuanced understanding of these attractions as for-profit business speculations and financial risks.

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57; Kevin J. Avery, “‘Whaling Voyage Round the World:’ Russell and Purrington’s Moving Panorama and Herman Melville’s ‘Might Book,’” *American Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (Spring, 1990): 50-78.

<sup>518</sup> Benjamin Russell to Henry F. Thomas, 4 May 1851, Henry F. Thomas Papers [1841-1859], New Bedford Whaling Museum Research Library.

<sup>519</sup> Champney, *Sixty Years’ Memories of Art and Artists*, 96-98. Several newspapers reported the destruction of the panorama in their coverage of the Crystal Palace fire, noting that “one of the heaviest losses was sustained by Messrs. E.C. Hall, Lucien Ayer, and Madison Page, who owned the celebrated Panorama of the Rhine, painted by Champney. The panorama covers 20,000 feet of canvass, and was valued at \$20,000. It was totally destroyed, and we understand that there was not a cent of insurance upon it.” *Albany Evening Journal*, October 7, 1858.



Despite the challenges of the entertainment marketplace, the success of Banvard's Mississippi panorama turned American scenery into a viable subject to exploit for moving panoramas. While earlier panorama exhibitions had occasionally represented growing urban metropolises like New York City and Boston, or iconic American destinations such as Niagara Falls, the rolling nature of the moving panorama made it ideal for representing journeys. Through their movement they covered "thousands" of miles in a passage akin to the new experience of railroad or steamship travel, but in three hours or less. After the winter of 1846, panorama visitors could embark on at least four separate journeys down the upper and lower Mississippi, explore the Hudson and St. Lawrence River, travel the Ohio River, or visit remote locations along the expanding American frontier, including "Kansas and the Indian Nation," the "Oregon and Washington Territory," and California, especially its rumored gold fields.<sup>520</sup>

Scholars like Martha Sandweiss have argued that these American-themed panoramas contributed to a rising nationalist ideology in the mid-nineteenth century centered around the dream of westward expansion, but they have neglected the equally rich pool of non-American subject panoramas also circulating throughout the United States in the late 1840s and early 1850s.<sup>521</sup> This oversimplifies both the diversity of

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<sup>520</sup> "Fitzgibbon's Illustrated Panorama of Kansas! And Indian Nation!," broadside. Worcester, MA, 1857, AAS; "Excursion to Oregon & Washington Territory," broadside. Providence, RI, 1873, AAS; "Beale & Craven's Panoramic Voyage to California!," broadside. Providence, RI, 1854, John Hay Library, Brown University.

<sup>521</sup> In one sentence Sandweiss marginalizes the latter category. "If some American panoramacists wandered as far east as the Holy Land in search of subject matter for their pictures, most turned to American themes." Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 57.

panoramas on the American entertainment market and of antebellum America, a complex period when cultural currents drawing American attention west coexisted with deepening interests and ties beyond our shores. It was during the antebellum era that tourism as a form of leisure expanded beyond the purview of the rich, and when the expansion of the popular press exposed American audiences to news from abroad faster and more consistently than ever before.<sup>522</sup> For the hundreds of thousands that reportedly journeyed down the Mississippi with John Banvard, a comparable number sailed across the Atlantic to Europe with Walter McPherson Bayne. He advertised as much when he arrived in Washington D.C. in February 1850, announcing that more than 260,000 people had experienced his *Gigantic Panorama of a Voyage to Europe* in Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.<sup>523</sup> His expansive four-part program lasted nearly four hours and fascinated viewers like Mary Service Steen, a twelve-year-old school girl from Philadelphia who recorded her experience in unusual detail:

In the evening I went to see Bayne's Panorama of a voyage to Europe which I thought very pretty...Mr. Bayne commenced to show it precisely at 8 o'clock. He first showed us the city of Boston, Mount Washington House Dorchester Heights, Sixth Boston State House, Bunker Hill monument, Navy Yard...and many other things...the Panorama stopped at the part which represented a storm at sea. The sea was rolling, the thunder made a thunderous noise, the rain and the lightning all together there was such a sound that it made me tremble.

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<sup>522</sup> J. Mark Souther and Nicholas Dagen Bloom, eds. *American Tourism: Constructing a National Tradition* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2012), ix-xxix; Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 29-33.

<sup>523</sup> "Positively Last Three Days...Bayne's Original Gigantic series of panoramas entitled a Voyage to Europe," broadside. Washington D.C., 1850. Library of Congress.

We saw the Packet Ship Washington Irving & Liverpool which was the end of the first section. The gas was then lighted and we once more had light. In a few minutes the lights were [lowered] and we were once again in darkness. We first saw the New House of Parliament, a Pleasure Party in the River, Hungerford Suspension Bridge, Waterloo Bridge, Somerset House, St. Bride's Church, Black friars Bridge... Iron Bridge next presented itself to our view and also London Bridge new & old, the ascension of a Balloon, & a general view of London & the Thames Tunnel brilliantly illuminated indeed, it looked so natural that I almost imagined myself in a carriage riding through it.<sup>524</sup>

In crossing the Atlantic, Bayne's audiences not only beheld Europe's older landmarks, but also witnessed for themselves the rapid technological advancement of the age, as the panorama featured the medieval "old London Bridge" alongside the stone and arched "new London bridge" that replaced it in 1831.<sup>525</sup> Bayne's panorama continued another two sections, traveling up the South and North Banks of the Rhine River on the continent, but young Mary's attention waned into the third and fourth hours of the exhibition. "He showed us many other things all of which were very pretty but I do not remember."<sup>526</sup>

Furthermore, these transatlantic moving panoramas also represent the continued draw of European study for some aspiring American artists, and the effects of those experiences within popular art in the United States. Before moving

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<sup>524</sup> Mary Service Steen journals [1847-1853, 1855-1857, 1860-1869], 18 May 1849, Winterthur Library: Downs Manuscript Collection.

<sup>525</sup> *Descriptive catalogue for Bayne's Gigantic Panoramic Picture of a Voyage to Europe* ([Boston]: s.n., [1848?]), 14. A copy annotated with almost fifty individual musical accompaniments for the panorama is in the collection of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Boston Public Library.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*

panoramas, European or internationally themed panoramas were largely imported, produced by English artists like Robert Ker Porter, the Barkers and Burfords of the Leicester Square and Strand panorama businesses in London, or imported dioramic shows like Maelzel's *Conflagration of Moscow*. Many American artists embracing the panoramic opportunity painted local scenery, but in the age of moving panoramas, many young working artists had European ties or experiences to draw from. Theater painter Bayne was English and translated his background into validation of the authenticity of his European voyage panorama. Several American-born artists, prior to speculating in moving panoramas, had lived abroad and modeled their panoramas on those experiences. Boston artist Amasa Hewins spent the early 1830s traveling throughout Italy, and in 1848 his sketches and recollections became the basis of William Hutchings' *Panorama of the Seas and Shores of the Mediterranean*, which Hewins designed and painted. Benjamin Champney sailed to Europe in 1841 and became a member of the "Out of Money Club" of Americans living and studying in Rome.<sup>527</sup> Philadelphia artist Samuel Bell Waugh also spent the early 1840s in Italy, and might have died there of a mysterious "Roman fever" had he not been nursed back to health by fellow artists James E. Freeman and Thomas Crawford.<sup>528</sup> From Waugh's time abroad came two successful moving panoramas, his *Grand Moving Panoramic Mirror of Italy* in 1849 and an expanded series of views he called *Italia* in 1854.

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<sup>527</sup> Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years' of Art and Artists*, 49; Harris, *The Artist in American Society*, 291.

<sup>528</sup> James E. Freeman, *Gatherings from an Artist's Portfolio in Rome* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1877), 81, cited in Harris, *The Artist in American Society*, 289.

Remarkably, a scene from Waugh's second panorama survives, but it is the final panel representing New York harbor and not the transatlantic journey Waugh took his audiences on.<sup>529</sup> (figure 6.2) Even artists John Banvard and John Rowson Smith, originators of the Mississippi panorama craze whose rivalry took them from the United States to Europe in 1848, returned from their sojourns with plans for international panoramas.<sup>530</sup> While abroad, Banvard traveled to and took sketches for his *Great Panorama of the Holy Land*, which premiered in 1853, while Smith returned to the United States with a *Gigantic Moving Panorama of the Tour of Europe* just two years later.<sup>531</sup>

Some aspiring panoramacists even drew on their travels to other destinations for their speculations. Osbert Burr Loomis's career took him to Havana, Cuba between 1843 and 1846 and again in the late 1850s, where by his own account he became "the most esteemed portrait painter" on the island. Upon returning to the United States in 1850, Loomis used his sketches of the Cuban countryside to create a *Panorama of*

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<sup>529</sup> *The Grand Moving Panoramic Mirror of Italy, painted by the celebrated American Artist S.B. Waugh* (Philadelphia; 1850); *Italia: A Hand-Book Descriptive of the New Series of Italian Views, Painted by S.B. Waugh* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1857); Samuel Bell Waugh, *The Bay and Harbor of New York*, ca. 1855, oil on canvas, 99 x 198 in. Museum of the City of New York.

<sup>530</sup> McDermott, *Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi*, 47-67.

<sup>531</sup> *Description of Banvard's pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land* (New York: s.n., 1853); John Rowson Smith, *Descriptive book of the tour of Europe: the largest panorama in the world now exhibiting at the Chinese Rooms* (New York: Pattinger & Gray, 1855). Admittedly, not everyone was impressed with Banvard's Holy Land pilgrimage panorama. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow visited the exhibition on January 10, 1855 when it traveled through Boston and wrote he was "much disappointed" with it. Longfellow journals, 10 January 1855.

*Cuba*.<sup>532</sup> (figure 6.3) New York theater painter John Evers assisted him with the painting of the panorama itself, working for five weeks and earning \$125 for his efforts.<sup>533</sup> These enormous visual spectacles certainly supported an expansion of knowledge and a growing imperialist discourse concerning westward expansion, but they also fueled curiosity about both the ancient world and the modern, industrializing one.

Finally, the “mania” around moving panoramas resulted from increasing numbers of middle class consumers whose expectations regarding public amusements were met by this amusement. Despite their best promotional efforts, earlier panorama exhibitions struggled to meet their own attendance goals because there was no stable or reliable audience to patronize them. The “humble, though more profitable art” was derided by elites as inferior to the elevated pursuits of fine art, but the cost of a ticket excluded many among working class people who might have considered patronizing the exhibitions. By the 1840s however, the leisure seeking middle class had emerged to filled this gap.

As with other forms of commercial “rational” amusements, by the mid-nineteenth century, families, women and children, and young urban workers began attending panorama exhibitions more regularly. For example, in 1849, twenty-two-year-old Philadelphia bookkeeper Nathan Stern Beekley kept such an active evening

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<sup>532</sup> *Biographical and Historical Record of the Class of 1835 in Yale College* (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1881), 106-108; Palmquist and Kailbourn, *Pioneer Photographs from the Mississippi to the Continental Divide*, 405.

<sup>533</sup> John Evers Notebook [1848-1853], Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

amusements schedule that he privately admonished himself. “Must stop going to places of amusement – it don’t pay.” Nevertheless, several times a week, Beekley found himself at concerts, dramatic performances, the Opera, lectures, museums, and panoramas. He attended Bayne’s Voyage to Europe, a *Panorama of the Wonders and Natural Curiosities of the American Continent*, and a *Mammoth Panorama of the Hudson and North River*.<sup>534</sup> Moving panoramas joined a class of respectable amusements appropriate for broad segments of the population. They were not so formal as to require a cloak or “fancy dress,” but *Godey’s Lady’s Book* actually suggested appropriate panorama-viewing attire in January 1851: “for panoramas, negro minstrels, or evening lectures, an ordinary walking costume is sufficient, and it would be very bad taste to go with the head uncovered.”<sup>535</sup>

However, just as quickly as audiences embraced moving panoramas in the 1840s, amusement culture shifted around them. In some communities, commercial amusements, including panorama exhibitions, continued to be protested on moral grounds. When L.E. Emerson traveled with his *Panorama of California* throughout New England in the 1850s, he came into conflict with a teacher and minister in Hardwick, Vermont, with whom he was attempting to negotiate use of the local school house for his exhibition. The minister refused strongly and later cautioned his pupils against “the demoralizing influence of Panoramas in general, and this one of

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<sup>534</sup> Nathan Stem Beekley Diary [1827-1877], 3 July, 26 July, 28 August 1849, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>535</sup> “Chit-Chat Upon Philadelphia Fashions for January,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 42, issue 1 (January 1851): 71.

California in particular.”<sup>536</sup> For other exhibitors, the formula for attracting the expansive audiences required for profitability proved elusive. Benjamin Champney counted among his supporters several members of Boston’s cultural elite including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who had assisted the artist in developing his souvenir program and advertising the exhibition. Champney thanked Longfellow with gifts of small sketches of the river Rhine, likely now the only surviving visual records related to his panorama.<sup>537</sup> (figure 6.4) While he relished these patrons, Champney nevertheless lamented that “the great masses of people upon whose support the financial success of the exhibition depended did not come out.”<sup>538</sup>

Because of their own declining quality and increasing competition from other public visual amusements such as magical lantern exhibitions, panorama exhibitions faded slowly from favor in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>539</sup> “Dr. Judd,” an itinerant showman who traveled with several moving panoramas in the 1840s and 1850s, recalled that the initial demand among showmen for these amusements was so high that they quickly saturated the market with inferior “daubs,” and that “after the

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<sup>536</sup> L.E. Emerson Diary [1853-1855], 22 October 1855, Maine Historical Society.

<sup>537</sup> The two small sketches of the Rhine by Champney are in the Longfellow House Washington’s Headquarters’ Fine Art Collection in Boston, Massachusetts. The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C., also holds two drawings by Champney. Originally part of a letter Champney wrote to Kemble on April 12, 1850, the drawings depict two theater interiors: one for a reading of Shakespeare by Kemble and the other, a performance of Champney’s *Panorama of the Rhine*.

<sup>538</sup> Benjamin Champney, *Sixty Years’ Memories of Art and Artists*, 97.

<sup>539</sup> Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, 263-285.



close of the Civil War panoramas had to take a back seat in the amusement line.”<sup>540</sup> By the 1870s, popular newspapers were already fondly reminiscing about “the days when panoramas were highly popular,” just twenty years earlier.<sup>541</sup> This was an inauspicious end to a medium that had evolved with the young United States.

Panorama exhibitions may have disappeared from American exhibition halls, but their legacy—of spectacle and commercialization of “art,” inherent speculative risk, and belief in their instructional value—lived on. In at least one instance, panoramic amusements found a new home in the domestic sphere, transformed into optical toys by the Milton Bradley Company of Springfield, Massachusetts. Hoping to cash in on the emerging U.S. market for educational toys, in the late 1860s Milton Bradley began developing and selling instructional board games, puzzles, novelties, and optical toys.<sup>542</sup> This included at least five toy moving panoramas, including the “Historiscope: A Panorama of America.” (figure 6.5) In the toy, the “monster moving panoramas” of midcentury were shrunken and enclosed within a small box only thirteen centimeters tall, twenty centimeters wide, and five centimeters deep. Through its decoration and construction however, the toy was an accurate homage to the commercial amusement it referenced. The front of the box was designed to resemble a theater, the arches along its upper edge leading the eye to the balconies flanking the

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<sup>540</sup> Dr. Judd, “The Old Panorama,” *Billboard* (Dec. 3, 1904): 25-26.

<sup>541</sup> “A Reminiscence of the Days When Panoramas Were Highly Popular,” *New York Clipper*, December 19, 1874.

<sup>542</sup> Jennifer Lynn Peterson, “The *Historiscope* and the Milton Bradley Company: Art and Commerce in Nineteenth-Century Aesthetic Education,” *Getty Research Journal*, no. 6 (2014): 175-176.

stage and filled with spectators. The cut out in the box acted as the proscenium framing the “panorama” picture, which was secured upon two rollers hidden inside the box. A small metallic crank fitted into a mortis on top of the rollers allowed the panorama to be moved.<sup>543</sup>

For young children, the *Historiscope* created an interactive visual lesson on the founding of America. In the family where the *Historiscope* “gained a foothold,” history could “repeat itself a great many times.”<sup>544</sup> The game encouraged children to take up the role of showman and educator and by embracing that performative role, absorb the historical lessons associated with the panorama’s imagery. The toy came with several accessories, including tickets “for sale” in advance of the performance, an advertising broadside to “publicize” the event at “Fireside Hall,” and a lecture script that outlined the narrative intended to accompany the moving panorama. A “Professor Easelpalette” was the advertised proprietor for the exhibition, but “owing to a severe and sudden indisposition,” was unable to perform, allowing the ambitious child showman the opportunity to step in “to entertain and perhaps instruct.”<sup>545</sup> Twenty-five episodic lithographic scenes represented major events in early American history: Columbus’s landing in the West Indies; the founding of colonial settlements in New

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<sup>543</sup> To see the panorama in motion, see the Cornell University Library video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZqh-YRSe1c>

<sup>544</sup> Advertisement for “The *Historiscope Improved*,” *Bradley’s Game and Toy Catalogue, 1889-90* (Springfield, Mass: Milton Bradley Company, 1889-90), 46, cited in Peterson, “The *Historiscope* and the Milton Bradley Company,” 180.

<sup>545</sup> “*Historiscope Lecture*” ([Springfield, Mass.]: Published by Milton Bradley & Co., [1868]). The entire assemblage can be found in the Winterthur Library, Downs Collection

England, Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania; and the unfolding of the Revolutionary War, from the “Boston Tea Party” to Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown. Once a family was tired of the provided script, the *Historiscope’s* fun and instructional value did not have to end, as “it is suggested that the young members of the family take turns in preparing original lectures which they shall deliver at the exhibitions.”<sup>546</sup>

There was, perhaps, a certain irony here for the parents who had actually attended these commercial attractions in their prime and now found themselves introducing their children to the phenomenon. The *Historiscope’s* advertising broadside, formatted exactly like those used to promote commercial attractions throughout the nineteenth century, is loaded with subtle judgments about panorama exhibitions that children might have missed but adults would have understood. (figure 6.6) It mocks the promises and exaggerations made by enterprising panoramacists like “Professor Easelpalette,” who grandiosely proclaimed their rough productions to be “true to Nature,” satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded, unless of course “the proprietor requires the stamps to meet his personal expenses.” It pokes fun at the panorama’s ephemerality and itinerancy by informing prospective *Historiscope* ticket buyers that reserved seats are sold “one year in advance.” The advertisement even derides the common nineteenth-century practice of distributing free tickets to select individuals in hopes of garnering good publicity by listing its own “dead-head list,”

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<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 8.

which included conductors, editors, and hotel clerks along with “poodle dogs in arms” and “orphan children of Revolutionary soldiers, accompanied by their parents.”<sup>547</sup>

The most revealing slogan however, and the one that perhaps best encapsulates the nineteenth-century legacy of these art entertainments is emblazoned across the top of the broadside: “Art *sacrificed* to the public!”<sup>548</sup> Panorama exhibitions, for better or worse, had been commercial art productions designed to amuse and attract the patronage of the public at large. They were theatrical, spectacular, and at times impractical, but their “sacrifice” to the nineteenth-century American public provides a unique lens into the multifaceted world of early American entertainment and its contribution to this critical moment in American history when the nation was taking shape.

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<sup>547</sup> “Editors’ Sans-Souci: Dead-Head,” *Bizarre, For Fireside and Wayside*, vol. III (Philadelphia: Church & Co., 1853), 15.

<sup>548</sup> “Art Sacrificed to the Public! The Historiscope, A Complete Panorama of America,” broadside. Ca. 1868. ([Springfield, Mass.]: Published by Milton Bradley & Co., [1868]). The Winterthur Library, Downs Collection.

## TABLES

<b>Profits &amp; Loss Statement for Catherwood &amp; Jackson's Panorama. July 31 1838 to October 30, 1841</b>		
	<b>EXPENSES</b>	
<b>A</b>	<b><i>Initial Investment Expenses</i></b>	
1	Money paid to July 31, 1838 (building expenses and investment)	\$8179.57
2	Payments to Purchase Panoramas	\$5955.55
3	Panorama Insurance and Freightng Costs	\$1450.97
<b>B</b>	<b><i>Ongoing Expenses</i></b>	
1	Panorama Rental Fees	\$5333.36
2	Ground Rent to William B. Astor	\$6702.05
3	For Gas from Manhattan Gas Light Company	\$4936.08
4	Weekly payments to Employees (five named)	\$4030.49
5	For Production of Books of Description (stereotyping text and engravings)	\$913.33
6	For Newspaper Advertisements	\$1175.95
7	Miscellaneous Daily Expenses	2629.13
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$42832.48</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>INCOME</b>	
1	Cash Received July 31 to Nov. 14 1838	\$2525.41
2	Ticket Sales for Panorama of Jerusalem	\$5290.16
3	Ticket Sales for Panorama of Rome	\$3591.65
4	Ticket Sales for Panorama of Thebes	\$3362.78
5	Ticket Sales for Panorama of Bay of Islands	\$1772.55
6	Ticket Sales for Panorama of Lima	\$1210.34
7	Ticket Sales for Panorama of Niagara (exhibited after July 17, 1841)	\$345.89
8	Season Ticket Sales	\$904.37
9	Book of Description Sales	\$1860.41
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$20863.56</b>

Table 1 Expenses and Income recorded in Frederick Catherwood's Account Book from July 31, 1838 to October 30, 1841.

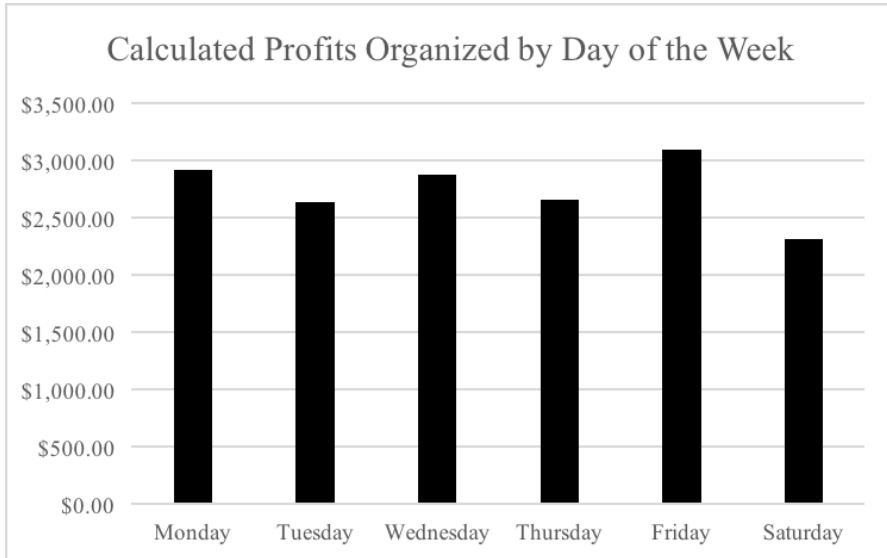


Table 2 Panorama profits organized by day of the week, as based on a breakdown and analysis of the Frederick Catherwood Account Book.

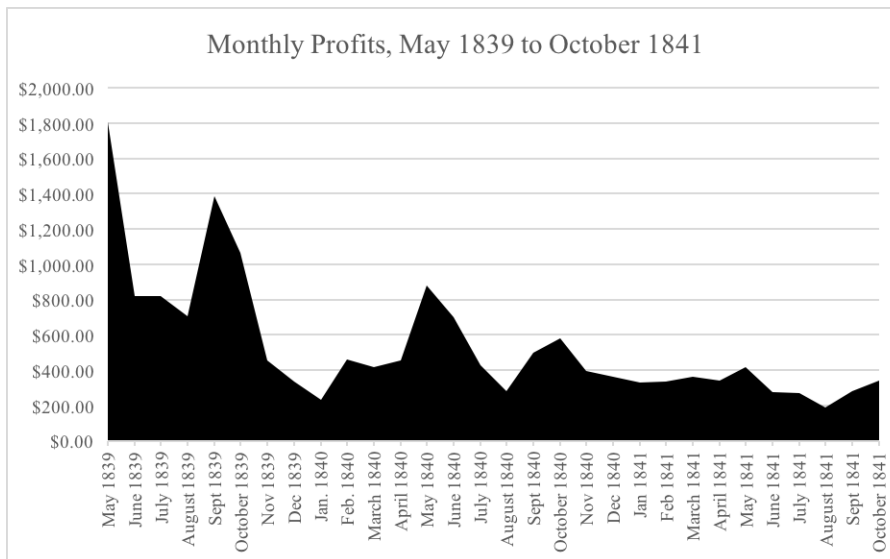


Table 3 Panorama profits organized by month, as based on a breakdown and analysis of the Frederick Catherwood Account Book

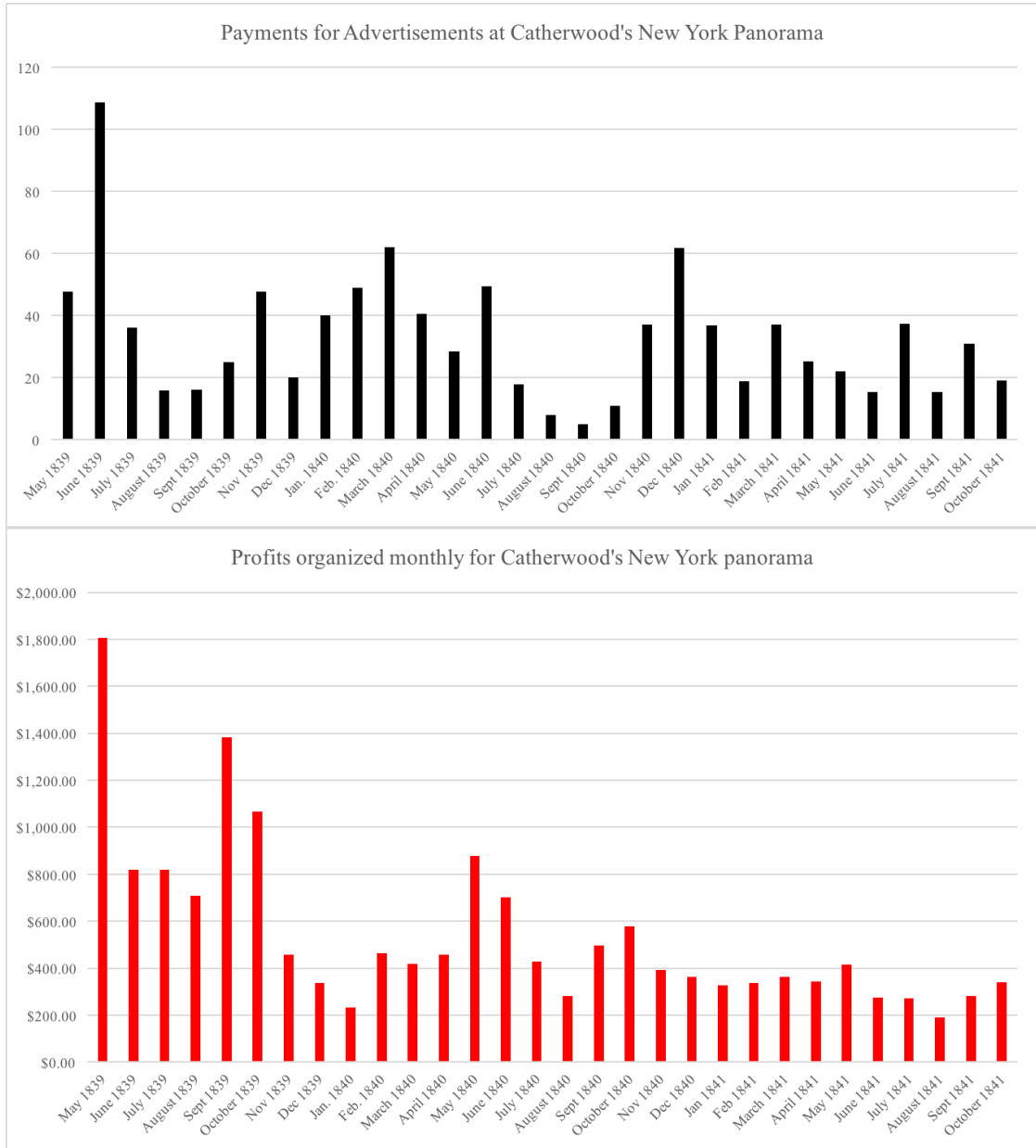


Table 4 Monthly payments to advertisers compared to monthly profits as recorded in the Frederick Catherwood Account Book.

Catherwood's Advertisers	
Newspapers (in order of appearance)	Publication Information
Boston Courier	Boston, MA
Providence Journal	Providence, RI
The American	
The Post	Likely The Evening Post, New York, NY
The Express	New York, NY
Town Commerce	
The Gazette	New York, NY
New York Courier	New York, NY
New York Commercial Advertiser	New York, NY, Daily (except Sunday)
Journal of Commerce	The New York Journal of Commerce, Daily Morning paper
(N.Y.) Transcript	New York, NY
Saturday Evening Post	New York, NY, Daily Evening Paper
The Sun	The New York Sun, New York, NY, Daily
New York Observer	New York Observer and Chronicle, New York, NY
Boston Atlas	Boston, MA, Daily
Herald	The New York Herald, New York, NY Daily
Democratic Whig	Bellafonte, PA
N.Y. Evangelist	New York Evangelist, New York, NY
Times Watchman	
Long Island Star	Brooklyn, New York
The Times	New York?
S.M. News	
S.M. Atlas	
N.Y. American	New-York American, Daily Evening Paper
American Traveller	Boston, MA (1825-1842), Semiweekly
The Churchman	New York, NY
Enquirer	The Richmond Enquirer, Richmond, VA
The National Gazette	The National Gazette and Literary Register, Philadelphia, PA
The Evening Star	The New York Evening Star, New York, NY
The Tattler	The Dispatch & Tattler, New York, NY
Albany Evening Journal	Albany, New York
The North London Gazette	
New Haven Palladium	New Haven, CT, Weekly
Baltimore American	Baltimore, MD
Newark Daily Sentinel	Newark, NJ
The Washington Globe	Washington, D.C., Semi-weekly
N.Y. Albion	The Albion, or, British, colonial, and Foreign Weekly Gazette
New Bedford Mercury	New Bedford, MA
Albany Argus	Albany, New York
Paul Pry	Washington, D.C., Semi-weekly
Catholic Register	New York, NY
The Signal	The Evening Signal?, New York, NY
Sunday Morning Atlas	New York, NY (1838-1840), Sunday paper
Sunday Morning News	New York, Sunday paper
Evening Post	New York, NY, semiweekly
Religious Intelligencer	New Haven, CT
Protestant Vindicator	New York, NY
Boston Traveller	Boston, MA
Hudson River Chronical	Ossining, New York
The New York American Advocate	New York, NY
The Evening Signal	New-York Evening Signal, New York, NY, Daily Evening
Grand M. Atlas	
The Tribune	The New York Tribune, New York, NY

Table 5 Newspapers and periodicals issued payments for published advertisements by Catherwood's Panorama between 1838 and 1841. Columns without data in the second column have not been verified due to vague language in the account book.



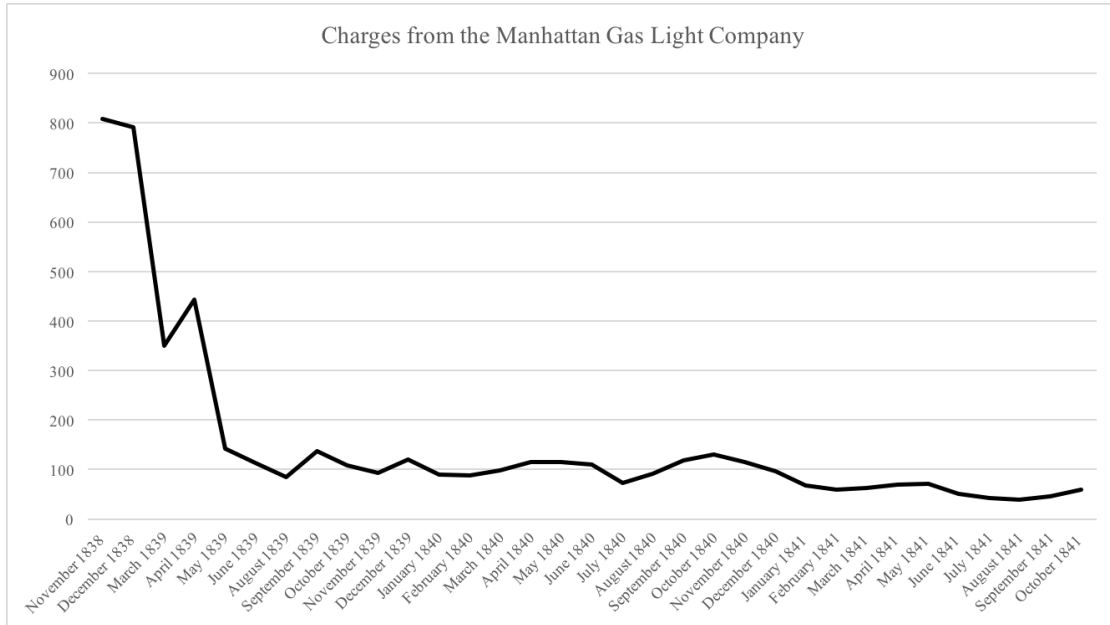


Table 6 Monthly recorded expenses from the Manhattan Gas Light Company, as recorded in the Frederick Catherwood Account Book.

## **FIGURES**

Figures removed due to copyright.

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Library of Congress  
New York Historical Society  
Massachusetts Historical Society  
Saco Museum, Saco, Maine  
Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

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